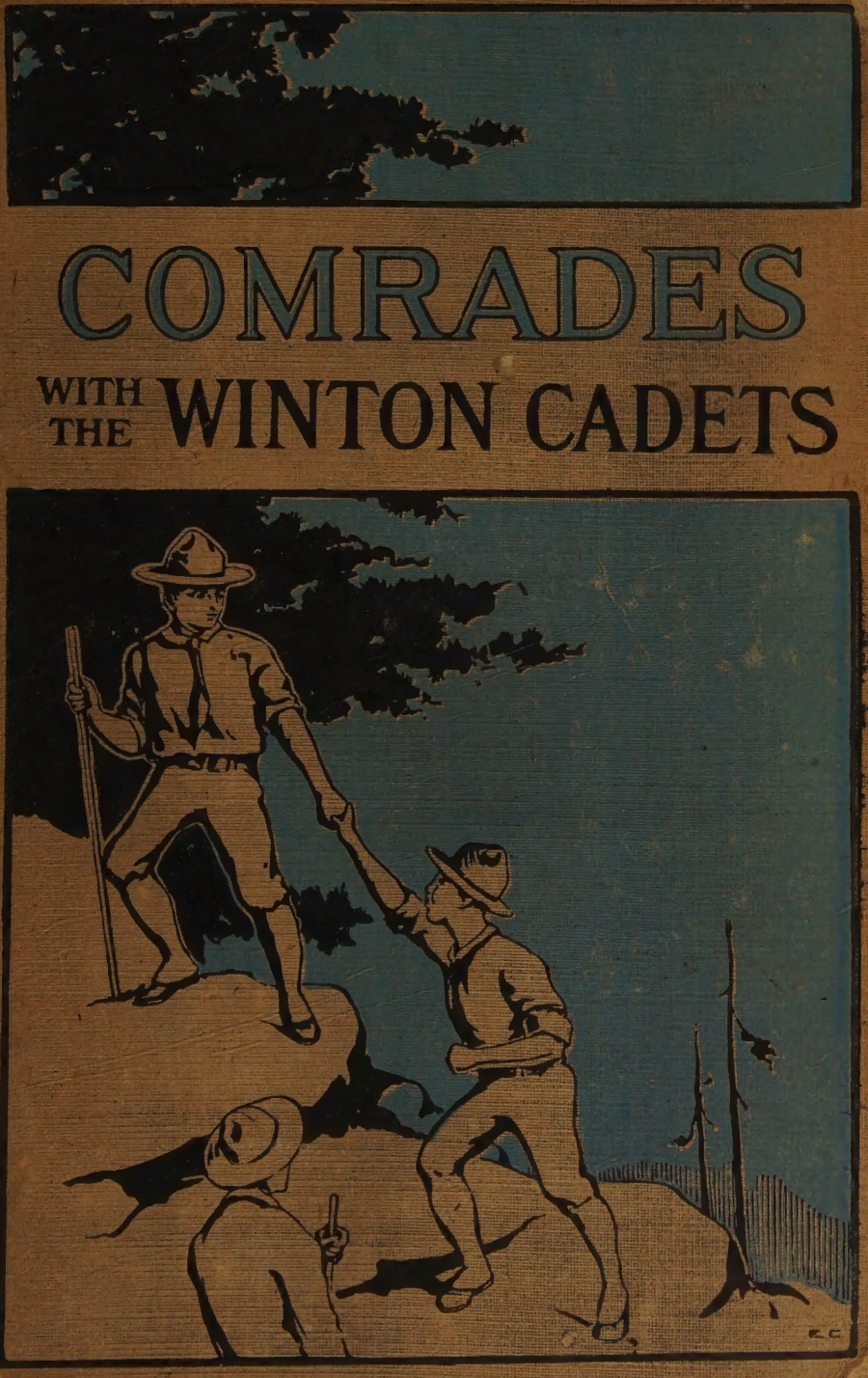
COMRADES
WITH THE WINTON CADETS



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COMRADES WITH THE WINTON CADETS

OR

LEADING THE YEARLINGS AGAINST THE PLEBES

BY

RALPH VICTOR

ILLUSTRATED BY

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By RALPH VICTOR

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	Hazing the Plebes	9
II	In the Cave	21
III	Confidential Chats	36
IV	Darcy and the Jap	47
V	The Theft	58
VI	On Winton Oval	67
VII	The Game With Jackson	77
VIII	The End of the Struggle	88
IX	A Talk With Lucy	97
X	What Happened to Mumford	107
XI	The Fight	118
XII	The Roller Polo Match	129
XIII	The Plotters	143
XIV	Winton Tackles Columbia	156
XV	On Edge	167
XVI	Tom is Surprised	174
XVII	The Challenge	186
XVIII	The Fencing Bout	196
XIX	In the Shooting Gallery	207
XX	Preparing for the Marathon	219
XXI	The Race	231
XXII	The Matter of the Watch	247
XXIII	Conclusion	257

COMRADES WITH THE WINTON CADETS

CHAPTER I

HAZING THE PLEBES

"A NEW leader for the plebes, did you say, Fleet?"

"Yes; his name is Darcy Mumford. Wilkes Davis says he comes from Buffalo, and thinks he's 'it.'"

"And that," said Chot Duncan, "is against the rules and regulations of Winton Hall."

He winked slyly at his companions as he spoke, and there was a general smile as the intended significance of the words dawned upon them.

It was evening on the Winton parade ground. The sunset gun had just boomed out a welcome relief from the arduous labors of the day, and our old friends, the Comrades, with several of their chums, were strolling about, discussing the new crop of plebes which had arrived a few days before from Professor Strang's Preparatory School at Stockdale, five miles farther down the Hudson.

For the benefit of those who have not met the

Comrades, and read of their previous exploits, as set forth in "Comrades At School," "At Winton Hall," "On Winton Oval," and "In Camp," as well as in other volumes telling of their adventures before their academy days, it may be said that the trio was composed of Chot Duncan, Tom Pratt and Fleet Kenby, all of Mortonville, New York. When the present story opens they were beginning their second year at Winton Hall on the Hudson. After the usual trying experiences as plebes in their initial year at the school, but in which they came off with high honors, they were now installed as yearlings, and were looking forward with as much pleasure toward making life miserable for the plebes as they had looked forward the previous year with dread as to what the yearlings would do to them.

Their vacation time had been spent on a canoe trip up the Hudson into the St. Lawrence, and thence up that great river to the Thousand Islands, where they had found many stirring adventures awaiting them.

With the Comrades on the parade ground were their bosom chums, Bert Creighton, Randy Denton, Pod Meelick and Dan Kirlicks. These, with Wilkes Davis, who came up a moment later, formed what had become known at Winton as "The In-

separable Eight." It was these boys who had sent terror into the hearts of the yearlings during their first year at the school. By reason of certain "stunts" they had pulled off, in which the yearlings received decidedly the worst of it, they were not yet safe from these same yearlings, now known as third classmen. They knew, however, that when a Winton cadet reached his third year he apparently took on a new dignity and rarely condescended to notice those of the two lower classes unless some flagrant disregard of the rules forced them to adopt drastic measures.

The boys continued to discuss the advent of Darcy Mumford, the "smart" plebe from Buffalo, and his band of cadets, who, if reports were to be believed, were determined to make as good a record against the Comrades and their yearling classmates as the Comrades had made against the other yearlings the year before.

"I was passing the barracks at noon," said Pod, "and I overheard a crowd of plebes talking it over. This fellow, Mumford, seems to have it in for you, Chot, and he was telling the other boys what he intends doing to you before the year is over."

"That's pleasant news," Chot smiled. "The chances seem good then for a little excitement."

"Well, he'll leave Chot alone if he knows when he's well off," said Bert Creighton.

"Of course, it is not my intention to disparage Chot's abilities in any way," said Dan Kirlicks, "but one look at this Mumford chap has convinced me that he must be an athlete of considerable merit, in spite of his boasting ways, and apparently enlarged opinion of his own abilities."

"He *is* a husky looking boy—that's sure," said Randy Denton.

"That'll only make things more interesting for Chot," said Fleet.

"Oh, I don't know," said Chot. "There's such a thing as a fellow meeting his match some day."

"You don't mean that you think he can whip you?" cried Pod.

"No; but the unexpected frequently happens. I am not infallible."

"Among other things, Mumford claims to be an expert fencer, a great roller polo player and a Marathon runner par excellence," said Wilkes Davis.

"Who was telling you?" queried Tom.

"Hoki."

"Hoki?" queried Randy, blankly. "Who's Hoki?"

"Wake up!" cried Pod. "He's Chot's protegé — the little Jap we brought down from the Thousand Islands last August, after we helped that secret service man, Stanwood Grey, break up the smugglers. He's a mighty intelligent boy, is Hoki, and Chot found no trouble in getting Commandant Cullum to admit him to the academy."

"For some reason," said Wilkes, "Darcy Mumford has taken a dislike to Hoki, and from what I can learn, things are apt to reach a crisis between them very shortly."

"Well, all I've got to say is that he'd better not pick on Hoki because he's a Jap," said Chot, his teeth coming together with a sharp click. The expression on his face was not ferocious, but there were lines of determination about his mouth that denoted strength of character. And when Chot Duncan declared himself so forcefully, his chums had learned to take heed.

"As far as that goes," said Tom, "Hoki's pretty well able to take care of himself. Look what he did to Carter Dane before we left Mortonville this summer. Why, Dane never knew what struck him."

"What did Hoki do?" asked Dan.

"Brought his jiu-jitsu into play, and Dane didn't

last five seconds. Dane is the leader of the village boys and he thought Hoki was an easy mark — but he learned his mistake."

"And there's another plebe in the new class whom Mumford has taken a dislike to," said Pod, "and that's Ted Lanham, the boy we rescued from the cat-boat on our canoe trip up the Hudson."

"Oh, he wouldn't dare do bodily injury to a frail boy, like Ted," protested Chot.

"According to reports he has a beastly temper and will stop at nothing," said Wilkes.

Truem Wright, the latest member of the Comrades' circle came up at this moment. Truem hailed from the same town as Pod — Bayville, New York. There he had been the village bully. He had brought his bullying tactics to both Stockdale and Winton, but having finally been shown his error by the Comrades, he had been turned from a bitter enemy into a steadfast friend. His aid in the capture of the smugglers, and his general good conduct on the Comrades' visit to the Thousand Islands, had won a place for him in their regard, and they had already decided that during the present year the name of the band should be changed to the "Inseparable Nine."

Truem was manifestly excited over something,

and as he paused in the midst of his chums, panting for breath, Chot asked:

"What's happened, Truem?"

"The time has arrived to take these plebes down a few pegs, particularly this fellow, Darcy Mumford," was the reply. "The way they've been talking this afternoon is something scandalous, and clearly in violation of the rules governing the conduct of one class toward another. I suggest, fellows, that we lose no time, but give them a little sample of our hospitality to-night."

"To-night!" cried Fleet. "A good idea — let's do."

"I see no reason for postponing our little entertainment," said Chot. "It's got to come sometime, and we may as well 'take them down a few pegs,' as Truem says, before they get to believing themselves absolutely invulnerable."

The other boys agreeing, the "Nine" sat for the better part of an hour discussing the matter. When they finally scattered to their rooms a plan had been formulated which they felt would bring the desired results — not only forcing the required humility on the part of the plebes, but, incidentally, causing much merriment for the yearlings.

Finally, tattoo, the signal for the evening roll

call, sounded, after which the cadets were given fifteen minutes to undress and get in bed before the signal, "Lights out!" was given.

As the big clock on the chapel chimed ten, "The Inseparable Nine" arose silently, and with many a quiet chuckle, began getting into their clothes. A few moments later they stepped out into a dimly-lighted corridor, making silent signals to each other, and conversing in whispers when conversation was found to be necessary.

The rooms of Darcy Mumford and his fellow plebes — such as had been selected for the sacrifice — had been located by the yearlings earlier in the evening, and there was no friction in their movements as they now set about the execution of their purpose.

Chot and Tom undertook the task of arousing Mumford and his room-mate, Will Siddons, while the other boys were sent to the rooms of the rest of Darcy's own personal band.

"What is it?" cried Darcy, his voice trembling with excitement at being aroused from a sound sleep.

"Don't ask questions, but get up and dress yourself," advised Chot.

"Oh, it's you, Chot Duncan, and who's that with

you? Yes, I see — it's Tom Pratt. What do you want?"

"We want you to get up, and hurry."

"Well, you just make me, will you?"

"Only too glad to oblige if you say so. We'll not only get you up, but we'll dress you, so if you want your clothes on straight, my advice is to put them on yourself."

"I suppose you are going to haze me?"

"You are at liberty to suppose what you please."

"Well, I warn you right now to be careful what you do."

"Will you get up?" Chot demanded sharply.

"Yes; I'll get up," was the sullen reply.

Having no desire to be taken from his bed and dressed, Darcy got slowly out and felt for his clothes, protesting in a loud voice that it was an outrage.

"Lower your voice," warned Chot.

"I don't care who hears me, Chot Duncan."

"Well, if you're not man enough to see this thing through without trying to awaken the commandant, I feel sorry for you — that's all."

"I'm not trying to awaken the commandant."

"Sounds very much like it to me."

"But I'm not, I tell you!"

"Then dress yourself and keep still!"

Tom found little trouble in making Siddons do as he wished, and a short time later the boys went out into the corridor with their captives. Here they found five other plebes — Mumford's cronies — in the hands of Bert and the other boys, and at a motion from Chot the party moved silently toward the head of the stairs.

"Where are you going to take us?" growled Mumford.

"Keep still and you'll find out," said Chot.

There was an excited murmur from the plebes when the parade ground was reached and the plebes were headed down the bank toward the river.

"We're going to the boat-house," one of them said in a low voice.

But the boat-house was passed and the party continued in silent procession along the shore. The boat-house was too near the commandant's residence for hazing purposes, hence the cadets were forced to seek other quarters for their fun.

"We're going to the old fort," said another plebe, after a moment.

"No; the fort's up the other way," replied Will

Siddons, then all fell silent at a warning command from Fleet.

The plebes, being new to Winton, were not aware that there was a cave about midway between Winton and Stockdale, where hazing could be carried on with the utmost secrecy. This cave, opening directly onto the shore of the Hudson, was an ideal spot for such a purpose. The Comrades were thoroughly familiar with the place, having been shut in there once by Truem Wright, and, later, having been hazed there by the yearlings — a hazing which was vividly impressed on the minds of all, but particularly on that of Truem Wright, who had been taken to the inner passages of the cave and there allowed to stay. With no light by which to find his way through the many labyrinths and passages to the open air again, there is no telling what might have happened to him, but Chot Duncan, had on that occasion secreted himself in the cave, and after the others had gone, went to Truem's rescue with a torch.

There was no moon, but there was a multitude of stars, the sky being perfectly clear, so the way was fairly light as the cadets moved rapidly down the shore. Haste was necessary, because if they were out too long there was a chance that their

absence would be discovered, and this would mean demerits, and plenty of them.

Finally the cave was reached, the big stone at the mouth rolled away, and then, one of the boys producing an electric flash-light, the party filed silently into the dark recess, several of the plebes shivering in dread of anticipated torture as they went, but knowing that resistance would be futile.

Once inside the cave, torches were produced as if by magic, illuminating the interior with a pale, weird light.

There was a moment's dramatic pause as the yearlings formed a semi-circle about the light. Then, turning to his companions, Chot Duncan cried out in a stentorian voice:

"Comrades are you ready?"

"Aye, aye, we are ready!" came the response, delivered in solemn tones by the other members of the "Inseparable Nine."

CHAPTER II

IN THE CAVE

THERE followed a whispered conference between Chot and Bert Creighton, which resulted in the latter going off into a dark corner of the cave, taking Truem Wright with him. The boys disappeared like shadows into the blackness, making scarcely a sound. They had donned tennis shoes before coming to the cave, but the plebes did not realize this, and the way Bert and Truem glided off seemed positively uncanny.

"Now," said Chot, "the ceremonies are about to begin. He turned toward the plebes who were huddled in a group. "You young gentlemen are about to be initiated into what is known at Winton as 'The Society for the Benefit of Cringing Innocents,' these same cringing innocents being yourselves."

"That's your cue to cringe!" cried Pod Meelick, and one or two of the plebes did make an instinctive motion at the sound of his words, which brought a laugh at their expense from the yearlings.

"Don't let them scare you fellows," said Darcy Mumford in a boastful tone. "It's going to take more than a little darkness to scare me."

"Silence in the ranks!" cried Tom.

"Oh, this is a free country — I shall speak when I please, and where I please," was the reply, as the plebe lifted his head a couple of inches higher and glared superciliously at Tom.

"You'll be silent if we have to choke you," was Tom's response, delivered in such a forceful manner that Darcy, after muttering something beneath his breath, concluded that this was no place to display his bravado, and subsided.

"Mr. Denton," said Chot, "kindly bring the innocents before me one at a time, and you, Mr. Kenby, take their names and such other characteristics as we may find desirable in proceeding with the initiation."

"Very well, your most royal muchness; here is the first offender," said Randy. As he spoke he pushed one of the plebes forward. Fleet, at the same time approached Chot, a note-book and pencil in his hand.

"Your name?" Chot demanded.

"Morton De Lange."

"You live where?"

"Wherever I hang my hat."

"Don't be impertinent. For every impertinent answer you will get one more turn in the torture chamber. Let's see now — what was your number at Sing Sing?"

"I've never been there," snapped De Lange.

"Let not thy angry passions rise. For every answer delivered in a voice not nicely modulated, another turn in the chamber."

"What do I care about your torture chamber?" demanded the plebe. "You're not going to hurt anyone."

"Another impertinence. Ho! where is the captain of the guard?" cried Chot.

"Here, your highness," responded Dan Kirlicks. "What is your most august pleasure?"

"You're a month too late. This is my September pleasure. Lead the prisoner to his fate."

"Yes, your highness!"

Seizing the half-reluctant De Lange by the arm Dan hurried him off into the darkness in the direction taken by Bert and Truem.

"Next!"

"Here he is, your highness."

Randy pushed another plebe before Chot. Then, before the latter could question the new arrival,

from somewhere in the other end of the cave, far out of the range of the torches, came a series of unearthly yells.

"Oh, oh, let me go!" cried a voice, apparently in the greatest agony. "Oh, you fiends! No, no! not in that boiling caldron — anything but that!" Then the groans simmered down and died away.

"I reckon De Lange will alter his decision now about not getting hurt," said Wilkes Davis, in a low tone to Pod. The tone, however, was plainly audible to the other plebes, as Wilkes intended it should be.

"Yes," Pod replied, "but just wait till the next one gets in the chamber, and the next one, and so on. The last man, you know, gets double the torture of the others."

"Wonder who the last man is to be?" queried Wilkes in the same low voice.

"Mumford, I understand," returned Pod, confidentially.

The plebes moved uneasily as this conversation, apparently not intended for their ears, came to them.

"Say, I'm going to get out of this," said one of them. But he looked around, bewildered. The mouth of the cave was not visible, Fleet and Pod

having rolled the big stone into place. To one not familiar with the cave, the entrance, viewed from the inside, looked just like the rest of the jagged walls.

"Stay where you are, Fred — let's see this thing through. If we don't take our medicine now we'll get it some other time — and in worse doses," said another plebe.

The yells emanating from the torture chamber had now resolved themselves into heart-rending groans which gradually died out, leaving the cave as still as before.

"Your name?" Chot demanded, as he found another plebe before him.

"Will Siddons."

"Called 'Willie' for short, I suppose?"

"I am so addressed, however, only by my intimate friends."

"Indeed! Well, I'm going to send you to meet a few of your intimate friends. Lead him away!"

Dan fairly had to pull Siddons into the darkness, he hung back with such persistency. Dan soon returned and a moment later another series of groans and yells came to the cadets gathered about the torches — then all was still again.

"Next!" cried Chot. "Your name?" he de-

manded, as the third plebe, a red-haired lad with a pleasant face stood before him.

"Fiske Murphy, your honor," said the boy in a rich Irish brogue.

"Ah! French, I presume?"

"No; bad cess to yez! Not Frinch! I'm Irish, an' it's proud of it I am."

"Any relation to St. Patrick?"

"No. Be the saints, what d'ye think I am — a Methuselah? I was not even acquainted with the gintleman."

"From Dublin, I think you said?"

"No, begorra — from Cork."

"Pop!" cried Pod quickly, in a piping voice.

"What was that?" Chot demanded, striving to keep his face straight. Pod was noted as a joker.

"That was the cork, your highness," Pod replied. "I thought we'd better draw it."

"Right! Lead the prisoner away!"

"Oh, bedad, it's torture you'll be after givin' me, is it? Well, I don't know if it's a red hot furnace you'll be throwin' me into, or what not, but 'tis mesilf that'll get square for any injury done to me person."

"Aw, go on, before your hair sets your clothes on fire," drawled Pod.

"Say, show me the fellow that said that!" demanded the Irish lad, turning quickly. But Dan told him to be silent, at the same time giving him a jerk into the darkness, and they disappeared together. Dan returned a moment later, and before Chot could call for the next plebe the sound of a scuffle reached his ears, followed by the usual yells.

"Oh, oh, ye divils, to treat a poor boy that way!" cried a voice, in the richest of brogue, and Chot and Tom exchanged quick glances of amusement. The merry twinkle in their eyes was reflected in those of Pod, Randy and Wilkes, but neither smiled. The yells died away and Chot cried:

"Next!" Then, to the plebe which Randy led before him: "Your name!"

"Fred Whittington, sir."

"'Sir' is very good. That will serve to lessen your punishment somewhat."

"Thank you, sir."

"Fine. Keep it up. Where are you from?"

"Plumville, sir," said the plebe meekly.

"Plumville, eh?" Chot turned quickly to Fleet. "Look that up in the book. I'm not sure this candidate is eligible."

"Plumville," replied Fleet, as if reading from his note-book. "Population, 60 people — had 58 in 1900. An increase of 2 people in nine years."

"Oh, then that lets him in." Then, turning to Whittington: "Did you bring any pumpkins with you?"

"No, sir."

"Any squashes?"

"No, sir."

"How sad! Lead him away."

Fred Whittington's disappearance was marked by the same series of groans that had attended each of the other disappearances, then all was still again.

"Next!"

Randy led another plebe before Chot.

"Your name?"

"Carter Williams."

"Say 'sir.'"

"Sir, sir."

"Not 'sir, sir'; just 'sir.'"

"'Just sir.'"

"Where do you hail from?"

"None of your business."

"What! Lead him away. Tell the chief executioner to give him three extra baths in the boiling caldron for impertinence."

Dan returned just as Randy led another plebe before Chot.

"Your name?"

"Jospeh Reagan."

"Say 'sir.'"

"Sir."

"You mean your name is Joe, don't you?"

"Yes, sir — if that pleases you."

"It pleases me immensely. What does mamma call you?"

"Joey."

"Oh, mush!" drawled Pod.

"Silence!" Chot commanded. Then to Reagan: "And what does papa call you?"

"Joseph."

"Then, to strike a happy medium, we'll make it Joe."

"Yes, sir."

"Lead him away."

Again Dan returned. Only one plebe was left now — Darcy Mumford — and when Chot called "Next!" the boy from Buffalo was led before him.

"Your name?"

"You know my name, all right."

"Your name!"

"Well, Darcy Mumford."

"Sh!" cried Pod. "Mum's the word for Mumford."

"Silence!" cried Chot, while Darcy threw a look of anger at the little yearling.

"Oh, I'm silent, your highness," said Pod.

Chot turned again to Darcy.

"Where are you from?"

"Buffalo."

"Ah, yes; you are the meek and lowly innocent who has been boasting as to what he would do to the yearlings. Am I right?"

"Maybe."

"Am I right?"

"Well, yes."

"Then I am empowered by the yearling class to say to you that you are to mind your own business and leave them alone, on the penalty of getting your just deserts — and perhaps a few incidentals besides."

"I do as I please."

"And we do as we please. It pleases us just now to provide a little entertainment for your especial benefit." Chot faced the dark end of the cave, where the other plebes had been led and from which not a sound had come for the space of several

minutes. "Bring forth the White Terror!" he commanded.

An instant later there was a sharp hiss, and far off in the darkness the faint outlines of a skeleton assumed definite shape, growing larger and larger, until grinning hideously, it had approached the stature of a good-sized man.

"The White Terror," said Chot, turning again to Mumford, "is known to be extremely affectionate. It is anxious at this moment to embrace you. You are commanded to go and meet it."

"Is that all?" Mumford demanded, with a show of bravado.

"Yes! that is all."

"Oh, that's easy," said the leader of the plebes, in a boastful tone. "I'll soon finish off this skeleton of yours, and when I'm through with it, it won't be used soon again to scare unsuspecting plebes."

As he finished speaking he made a rush into the darkness and grappled with the white object. Darcy's intention was to destroy what he supposed to be a mechanical contrivance of some sort. Imagine his surprise, then, to find his arms encircling real flesh and blood. Before he had recovered sufficiently from his surprise to plan a new

course of action, he felt the breath squeezed out of him, then he was borne to the floor of the cave with more force than grace, and found himself rolling over and over in the embrace of the "spooky" looking thing Chot Duncan had styled the "White Terror."

Darcy tried to fight back, but found every move forestalled by the hideous skeleton, which, its grinning jaws close to his face, sent a thrill of horror through his entire being. Finally, bruised and lame from the many bumps he had received, he was released. The White Terror sprang up, seemed to whirl around, then vanished mysteriously into the darkness.

A short, sharp whistle sounded, followed by the shuffling of feet on the rocky floor. Darcy sat up, half-dazed, in time to see the forms of the yearlings skurrying toward what he divined to be the mouth of the cave, carrying the torches with them. He had a dim recollection of seeing someone roll a stone away, then the lights went out, and all was still in the cave. Intently he listened, but not a sound met his ears. Where were his comrades? The more he thought it over the more he felt they might be in some grave danger. Finally, he spoke:

"Will — Fred — Fiske — where are you?" he called.

His voice, sounding strange and unnatural, echoed through the cave, but not a sound did he hear in reply.

He called again and imagined he heard a groan from a point farther back in the cave. This suspicion was verified a moment later when he repeated the call. But beyond this mournful noise, he received no answer. He felt through his pockets. Yes; he had matches. How fortunate, he thought, that he had left his match safe in his clothes when undressing. Pulling it out, he lit a lucifer, but found the tiny flame did not penetrate the darkness beyond a few feet. He decided to move in the direction he felt his comrades must be before lighting another. The next time he called the groans were but a few feet away. When another match flared up he saw the forms of his chums lying bound and gagged on the floor of the cave.

It took but a moment to release the nearest, but the match flickered out before he had accomplished his task. A quick exclamation in an Irish brogue told him whom he had freed however. Telling Fiske to hold the matches and keep one lit all the

time, Darcy then set to work to free the others.

"A nice mess this is!" growled Will Siddons, as he struggled to his feet.

"Any of you fellows hurt?" asked Darcy.

"Hurt? Not physically. Creighton and Wright simply bound and gagged us, and then let off a series of groans to scare you fellows, and make you believe we were hurt."

"You fellows didn't do any of that groaning then?" queried Darcy, a sudden light dawning on him.

"No, of course, not. We were gagged and couldn't."

"But I heard Fiske Murphy's brogue."

"Sure an' ye didn't," protested that young gentleman. "Ye heard that fellow Creighton, givin' a bum imitation of me — that's all." The Irish lad was plainly displeased, for he growled out: "Just wait till I get me hands on him. I'm as big as he is an' I think I know a few things about handlin' me fists."

"Did you fellows see the skeleton?" asked Darcy.

"Yes," said Will Siddons. "We saw it. When it came your turn Creighton got into some sort of a black suit with a skeleton painted on it. Then

Wright smeared him with phosphorescence and he went out to meet you."

"Well, he gave me some bad bumps," said Darcy, a note of anger creeping into his voice.

"They've made fools of us all," said Morton De Lange.

"But we'll be square," said Siddons.

"We will that," said Darcy, resolutely. "This little affair to-night but strengthens the dislike I feel for Chot Duncan and every member of his band. Before we're through with them they'll wish they'd never brought us to this cave — now, mark my words!"

His words, uttered bravely, appealed to the others, and there were strenuous murmurs of assent as the boys, by aid of matches, began to work their way toward the mouth of the cave. "The Inseparable Nine" had obligingly left the rock away, so they found no difficulty in effecting their release. As they went up the shore toward Winton Hall, Darcy Mumford was groaning over the bumps he had received in the tussle with the White Terror, and vowing more desperate vengeance than ever. And each of his chums seemed thoroughly in accord with his sentiments.

CHAPTER III

CONFIDENTIAL CHATS

"SPEAKING of actors," said Pod Meelick, as the Comrades and their chums were gathered in the room of Chot and Tom a few days later.

"Now, who said anything about actors?" demanded Fleet, an angry gleam in his eye.

"Well, speaking of them anyway," said Pod, with a grin, "I understand they are very friendly toward playwrights."

"Why, I always understood that the average actor had a feeling of contempt for the playwright," said Dan Kirlicks.

"Well, all I know," replied Pod, assuming his most innocent expression, "is that actors are always taking the playwrights' parts."

"Wasn't that awful?" groaned Bert. "Another perpetration like that, and someone about your size will go shooting through the window feet foremost."

"I refuse to perpetrate another unless I can make my exit head foremost," grinned the youngster.

"By the way," said Randy, as if a pleasant

thought had just come to him, "do you fellows realize that we haven't had a poem this year?"

"Always glad to oblige," said Fleet quickly.

"Why did you remind him of it?" asked Tom.

"Never mind, you fellows," said Fleet.

"Fleet thinks because he's had a poem accepted by a New York publishing house that he has license to reel off verses any time he sees fit," said Chot.

"I noticed Fleet's head was expanding," said Dan, "but had no idea he was getting his vaporings into print."

"Nor I," Wilkes Davis chimed in. "When did the awful thing happen?"

"We're not sure it has happened — yet," returned Chot, with a wink. "Before leaving Mortonville for Winton this fall, Fleet showed us a letter purporting to be from the publishing house, accepting the manuscript of a poem he had sent.

"That letter was genuine," protested Fleet, "and you know it, Chot Duncan, and if any of you other fellows don't believe it, wait till the publication appears next month. Then each of you can satisfy his curiosity by purchasing a copy."

"Er — ahem! — I'm broke — let's change the subject!" said Truem Wright, quickly. "Er — go on, Fleet; you were going to recite a poem."

"Yes; so I was," said the fleshy lad. "Ahem! This poem is entitled 'Spring, Sweet Spring.'"

"Oh, gentle zephyrs!" cried Pod.

"What an original title," said Wilkes.

"Never mind," said Fleet. "I know that subject has been used before, but it has never been given the treatment I am giving it."

"Gee, it's sick — he's giving it treatment," piped Pod.

"That'll do you!" cried Fleet, glaring at him.

"Don't mind the joker — he's the poorest card in the deck," said Bert.

"Well, fellows," said Fleet, rising and clearing his throat again, "it goes like this:

"Spring, in its plumage of gay green and gold,
Is a story as sweet, and a story as old
As the story of Mary and her dear little sheep,
And spring is the time when we all love to sleep."

"I don't quite see the connection, there," said Bert, a blank look on his face, as he looked inquiringly at the other boys.

"Not intended to be a connection," said Tom — "this is merely a ramble."

"And then, you know, it wasn't a sheep Mary had; it was a lamb," said Chot.

"But what has sleep to do with Mary's lamb and the plumage of spring?" asked Bert.

I'm sorry this poem's too deep for you fellows," said Fleet. "Perhaps another year at Winton will polish up your poetic knowledge a little. This poem is one of the best things I've ever done."

"Which isn't saying anything at all," said Pod.

"Go on, Fleet," said Chot. "Perhaps you'll improve with the next verse."

And Fleet continued:

"Spring is the time, as I'm sure you all know,
When the summer winds come, and the winter winds go;
Spring, to be brief, is the time of the year,
Which the boys of old Winton hold sacred and dear."

"I'm glad he decided to be brief," said Pod.

"Who decided to be brief?" demanded Fleet.

"You did."

"I didn't."

"You said, 'spring, to be brief.'"

"Oh, yes, but that's only in the poem!"

"Of course, it's only in the poem — we know that — that's why we're congratulating ourselves. The poem is to be brief, don't you see?"

"In fact," said Truem, "the poem is ended."

"No; there's another verse —" Fleet began, but Chot cut him short.

"Don't see how we can stand more than two at once," he said.

"We can't," said Pod. "Anyway, I've another joke that won't keep. What I want to know is, when the season is Lent, who borrows it?"

"Hit him!" cried someone, and a perfect shower of articles clattered about the little fellow.

"Never touched me," he cried. "Now, you fellows can get busy and pick those things up before the inspection officer comes around. I like to see people work. And by the way, seeing you didn't like that joke, how's this one: Why are so many ladies going into the watch business?"

"Oh, give it up!" drawled someone. "What's the answer?"

"Because they produce handsomer faces and more delicate hands than the men," was the reply. Then Pod dodged in anticipation of another shower of missiles, but this time nothing came his way. A groan went up, however, which he took as a decided compliment. The boys always expressed their displeasure when he told a really good joke.

"Not changing the subject," said Wilkes, "I understand that we are to get out for football practice the day after to-morrow."

"But you are changing the subject," protested Pod.

"Silence, little one!" cried Tom. "Your words sound good to me, Wilkes."

Tom was a football enthusiast, and had distinguished himself in many ways the previous season when a member of the Winton team.

"I wonder what the chances of the 'nine' are to make the eleven?" Randy put in.

"Well, several of the 'nine' should make it," said Chot. "Tom's sure to be called upon to make one of his famous dashes for goal. As far as I'm concerned, I've never tried to make a specialty of football, though I like to play. Last year I did not try for the eleven, but went out to practice merely for the exercise, and they made me a substitute. This year, however, I'm going to work for a regular place on the team, so Tom won't get all the glory," and he looked at his chum with a smile.

"I'm going to try for a berth," said Bert, "but that's no sign I'll get it."

"I don't see how you can fail," said Tom.

"Nor I," said Chot. "Bert pulled the team out of some bad holes last season. Anyway, I understand that Hartley and Millet, two of last year's team, are not going to enter the lists this season. That leaves two openings, to say nothing of the

chance a man always has for beating out some of the old-timers."

"Who's going to captain the team this year?" asked Truem.

"Oh, Arnim, of course, and, I dare say, he will be the only fourth classman on the eleven, just as he was last year. Out of the third class, we're pretty sure to get Damon, Murphy, Klimt and Ardsley — and Harney if he cares to try for it. None of the others has shown any wonderful ability, and there is a chance that some of the new men will win out."

"Darcy Mumford, for instance, eh?" Wilkes suggested.

"I shouldn't wonder in the least if he'd make the team," Chot returned. "He's a husky fellow, and may be just the man we're looking for to buck the lines of the formidable rivals we are to encounter this year."

"There won't be any games to amount to anything except our yearly battle with Jackson, will there?" asked Pod.

"Yes; old Winton will have to extend herself more than ever this year if she expects to carry away the honors as she did last season," was Chot's reply. "First, there will be games with several of

the teams along the river. Then, during the first week in October, we play our annual game with Jackson and the winner has been conceded the privilege of meeting the Columbia College eleven on the Polo Grounds in New York a week later."

"Gee! but won't it be a feather in our caps if we win them both?" cried Fleet.

"It would be the finest achievement Winton has ever pulled off in the way of athletics," said Tom.

There was a sudden knock at the door, and upon Chot's invitation to enter, Hoki Nagasuki and Ted Lanham came in.

"Ah! here is our noble friend, the Jap," said Wilkes.

Hoki grinned good-naturedly. He was dressed in the regulation Winton trousers, but wore, instead of a jacket, a sweater, with a cap sitting jauntily on the back of his head — a typical American college boy so far as costume went.

Ted Lanham was a bright-faced young fellow, but physically rather delicate. The favorable impression formed by the Comrades and Pod when they had rescued him from the hands of the villainous boat captain on their trip up the Hudson, had been more than justified since they had grown to know him better.

Hoki's face grew suddenly serious as he faced the "Nine."

"I have quite some serious news," he said, and at his tone everyone listened intently. "Darcy Mumford," he continued after an impressive pause, "has expressed himself in such language as lead me to believe he will soon attempt violence to my person."

Hoki's quaint methods of speech gave several of the boys a desire to smile, but they controlled their features, fearing to offend the good-natured foreigner.

"Going to whip you, eh?" said Chot. "How do you know, Hoki?"

"He has been telling it over the marching campus."

"You mean the parade ground?"

"Yes, sir; that's it. He has been telling all the members of the plebeian class."

"You mean the plebes, Hoki."

"Yes, sir; that's it. Ted here, bring me the message that this Darcy boy will jump on my stomach and wipe my face in dust."

"And not content with that," said Ted, "he told me that if *I* didn't do everything he told me to, he'd teach *me* how to behave."

"What! Mumford told you that?" asked Chot.

"Yes."

"The cur!"

"How much do you weigh, Ted?" queried Tom.

"A hundred and eighteen."

"And Mumford tips the scales at fully a hundred and sixty, and is almost a head taller than you. Just let him lay a finger on you — that's all I've got to say!"

There was a decided murmur of approval from the other boys, and Ted felt a thrill of pride that he had found so many champions in his first year at school.

"As for Hoki," said Chot, "Mumford may find he has caught a Tartar when he mixes it with Japan. You haven't forgotten your jiu-jitsu, have you, Hoki?"

"Not on your living photo," was the Jap's response, at which the boys, no longer able to contain themselves, laughed outright.

"How's that for American slang?" cried Fleet.

"I know jiu-jitsu by heart," continued Hoki, "but this fist fighting — it is new and strange to me. I have a suspicion that I shall get Chot Duncan to show me about solar plexus and straight hook to jaw."

"Which I'll do with pleasure," said Chot. "But what have you been doing to Mumford, anyway?"

"That is just the rub, as you say — I do nothing to him, except I say one day, 'I believe I will try to get on feetball team; I hear it is one great American sport.' Then he say, 'Yes, you will — I don't think!' or something like that, to which I reply, 'Is this my business or yours?' and he says, 'I'm going to make it mine.' 'Well, if you do,' I make reply with some heat, 'you start something that will wind up in battered head for yourself.' Then he laugh and curl up corner of lip at me. I don't say nothing more, but pretty soon Ted come to me and say, 'Look out, Hoki; this fellow, Mumford, mean mischievousness.' Oh, well," Hoki concluded with a sigh, "I s'pose it's all in the shuffle, as you Americans say, and I have no doubt but what I can display considerable tactics for benefit of this boy."

"Oh, mamma!" cried Pod, "just let me be around when it happens — that's all I'll ask!"

And the other boys echoed his wish.

CHAPTER IV

DARCY AND THE JAP

DARCY MUMFORD, his heart still sore over the hazing of a few nights previous, was walking across the parade ground with Will Siddons and Fiske Murphy. Since the night in the cave Darcy had talked of nothing but vengeance on the Comrades and their yearling friends, until Fiske had grown tired of his chatter, and even Siddons, his roommate and bosom companion, frequently showed signs of disgust.

Darcy was still full of the subject this afternoon as the three boys walked leisurely toward the gymnasium.

"The more I think over it the madder I get," he said, for the third time, his teeth coming together with a sharp click, indicative of rage.

"Sure, and there's only one thing for ye to do, Darcy," said the Irish lad, "and that's challenge this Chot Duncan to a fight. Pummeling his face for him is about the best way to get square I know of."

"Oh, I'm going to fight him, all right," boasted

Darcy. "I'm only waiting till the proper time comes to force him into battle."

"Well, then for the love of goodness give us a rest till that time arrives, can't ye?"

"What's the matter with you, Murphy — got the sore head?"

"No; I ain't got the sore head. I'm tired o' hearin' ye vow desperate vengeance all the time — that's what! Kape it under your belt till it's time to act."

"Oh, you're trying to crawfish — that's what's the matter with you."

"Go on with ye!"

"You think you'll be forced into a fight yourself."

"Sure and there's nothin' I'd like better — but I'm not goin' to tell anyone about it till I get ready wid me shillalah."

"There's such a thing as talking too much, Darcy," said Siddons, in an effort to pour oil on the troubled waters. If Fiske and Darcy fell out it would cause considerable unpleasantness in the plebe ranks, and Will was bright enough to avoid this if possible. If they were to war among themselves they would make no progress against the yearlings — of that he felt sure.

"I didn't ask your advice, Will," flashed Darcy. "I do as I please. I may talk a good deal, but when the time comes to act, you'll find I can back up my talk in the proper way."

"Oh, I didn't mean you'd talk and not fight," Will hastened to say. "I'm quite sure you can lick this fellow, Duncan, but I don't believe it's wise to be talking about it too much."

"Oh, you're off your trolley to-day; so is Fiske," said Darcy. But he soon turned the talk into other channels, and Will felt that the Irish lad's rebuke had done a little good.

As they were passing the chapel, a cadet captain in the uniform of a fourth classman stepped out and accosted them. The boys recognized him as one of the drill masters, but failed to recall his name. Their hands went to their caps in a salute, however, which was immediately returned by the older boy.

"Which of you is Cadet Mumford?" demanded the fourth classman, who was none other than the Comrades' old enemy, Dill Newman, now in his last year at Winton Hall.

"That's my name, sir," said Darcy.

"May I have a few words with you?"

"Certainly."

Darcy excused himself and walked with Cadet Captain Newman to the steps of the chapel where they sat down. Will and Fiske, deciding that they were not wanted, strolled on toward the gym.

"It is bad form for me to seek out a plebe," said Newman, in an explanatory tone, "but there's something I've been wanting to say to you for several days. I — er — I hear there are several members of the yearling class whom you have not found as congenial as might have been expected."

"Be plain," said Darcy, gathering courage, when he realized that Newman was ready to recognize him as an equal — for the present, at least.

"I will, with the understanding that this is to remain strictly between ourselves."

"I can safely promise that."

"Well, Chot Duncan and Tom Pratt are the two cadets in this school whom I'd like to see expelled!" and Newman's face took on a ferocious look that startled Darcy for the instant.

"Eh? You mean —?"

"I mean this: Ever since they've been at Winton they've crossed my path, and there has never been any love lost on either side. They've tried by every possible means to humiliate me, and I've grown sick and tired of it. Now, *I've* sworn

to humiliate *them,* but this is my last year here, and unless I get busy before long it will be too late."

"What do you propose to do, Mr. Newman?"

"I've formulated no definite plan, as yet. I merely heard that you had been vowing vengeance on these fellows, and thought it might be well if we pulled together. Er — you understand!" he added significantly.

"Yes; I think I do, and you've heard right about my vowing vengeance," said Darcy. "If you're an enemy of Chot Duncan's, I'm with you in anything you undertake — only it must be strictly between ourselves."

"It's a bargain," said Newman. He extended his hand, which Darcy shook. "Sh! I see some fourth classmen coming up the walk. I can't be found talking to a plebe — nothing against you personally — merely the etiquette of the school, you know. But I'll get into communication with you in a few days and we'll get together on this."

Darcy nodded, and Newman disappeared around the side of the chapel.

"He is certainly in earnest about it," muttered Darcy. "I have an idea that he and I will make a great team," and thinking over the various points

of his conversation with Dill, he walked on to the gym, on the steps of which he found Will and Fiske waiting for him.

"Getting along finely, aren't you?" queried the former, with a sarcastic turn of the lip. "On intimate terms with a fourth classman! How did you win his favor?"

"Never mind," said Darcy, with a knowing wink. Then, with some trivial remark which served to allay the suspicions of his chums, he passed the matter over, asking them not to mention the fact that they had seen him with Newman. To this they agreed, wondering what there could have been between the two to cause such secrecy, but never dreaming that a conspiracy was being hatched against the Comrades and their friends.

In the gym they found a large crowd of cadets. The place was a commodious one, easily affording room for the amusements the cadets were fond of indulging in. Chot, Tom, Truem and Hoki were in one end of the big room, tossing a basketball back and forth between them. Bert, Pod and Randy were going through some exercises on the horizontal bars. Several of the other cadets were fencing, and in the rear, near the bathrooms, Captain Arnim of the Winton eleven was in earnest

conversation with Roy Damon, Ben Ardsley, Ned Klimt, and several other third classmen. Their talk was evidently on football topics, for Arnim was illustrating a new method of kicking, and the others were giving him their undivided attention.

Wilkes Davis, Dan Kirlicks and Fleet had donned their roller skates and were playing polo on a bare spot in one end of the gym.

Darcy and his friends joined a crowd of plebes who were watching Chot and Tom throw the basketball. Every now and then Chot would stop and explain some point to Hoki. The Jap would lend an attentive ear, and the next time he made a play some improvement was sure to be noticed.

"Hello, Darcy!" cried Morton De Lange, as the leader of the plebes approached.

Darcy returned the greeting with a nod and smile.

"What's going on here?" he asked.

"America is teaching Japan to play basketball," laughed Fred Whittington.

"America could find something better to do, I should think," said Darcy, his lip curling slightly in a sneer.

Both Chot and Truem, who were nearest the group of plebes, heard this remark, but though they

exchanged significant glances, neither gave any indication that Darcy's words had met their ears.

Darcy and his friends continued to talk in tones loud enough to be audible to the basketball players, and finally a remark brought a reply from Chot.

"What was that?" he asked, turning suddenly upon Darcy.

"I did not speak to you," said the plebe loftily.

"But you're going to speak to me now," said Chot. "I asked you what you said."

"And I don't see fit to tell you."

"You said something about my having a protegé, and that I might have chosen a better one than a Jap. Now, let me tell you something. You'd better bridle your tongue — you talk too much. The Jap is not a protegé, but a friend of mine, and anyone who says anything about him had better say it to someone besides me. Now, I trust we understand each other."

"Perfectly, Mr. Duncan," said Darcy. "But I have always had a habit of saying what I please. I see no reason yet why I should change that habit."

"It may be my pleasure to show you a reason one of these days," Chot replied, with a look the plebe could not fail to understand.

Darcy immediately turned his back on Chot, and continued in a loud voice:

"I'm going to protest as long as I stay here about a Jap being allowed to enter this school. It's an outrage."

Hoki had been a silent, though deeply interested, listener to Chot's talk with Darcy, and a secret satisfaction gleamed in his dark eyes, which turned to anger a moment later when Mumford continued his insulting remarks. Now the little Jap suddenly motioned that he would not play ball any more, and walked quietly over to a point near where Darcy was standing.

"Japanese people are friendly to American people," said Hoki, looking the plebe leader straight in the eye, "but you, sir, are an insult to American nation!"

There was a moment's silence after Hoki made this startling declaration, and cadets from all parts of the gym began to gather about the pair.

"Why, you little whipper-snapper, *you're* the insult, not *me!*" Darcy cried, then made a rush for the Jap.

Hoki did not even try to dodge, but as the big plebe reached out his hands to seize him, the Jap dived between his legs, upsetting him on the floor.

Darcy arose in a rage and rushed again. This time Hoki adopted new tactics. Bending low in anticipation of the other's rush, he suddenly seized the big plebe by one arm, and throwing the other about his neck, lifted him off the floor and sent him sprawling six feet away, where he lay, groaning.

"He's killed him!" cried Will Siddons, in alarm. He made a movement as if to go to his chum.

"Wait!" The command came like a shot from the Jap. "No help him! Let him help hisself till he has enough."

"The Jap wants to know if you've had enough, Mumford?" cried someone.

It was hard to be forced to admit it, but Darcy was in no condition to continue the attack. So he nodded faintly.

"He's got enough," said Roy Damon, turning toward Hoki. Then, with the assistance of Captain Arnim, he helped the plebe leader to his feet.

The little Jap bowed and walked away.

"That must have been jiu-jitsu," said Ned Klimt.

"Not jiu-jitsu," the Jap flung over his shoulder. "That nothing but plain wrestling. Jiu-jitsu more dangerous — it *kill* sometimes!"

"Just wait! Just wait!" Darcy Mumford was crying. "I'll get him for this! I wasn't familiar with those tactics — that's why he threw me. But I'll get him with something I am familiar with." Then he turned angrily toward Chot. "I suppose I've you to thank for this, Duncan."

"You talk foolishness, Mumford — you're not yourself just now. What Hoki does is none of my affair and I'm not meddling."

"Well, you and I will settle our little argument at some other time and place. I think you know what I mean."

"I understand you perfectly," Chot returned, "and don't hesitate if the spirit moves you to settle the argument soon."

He turned away with Tom and Truem and began throwing the basketball again. Hoki had disappeared from the gym for some reason which his friends could not fathom.

"So Mumford is forcing a fight on Duncan, is he?" murmured Arnim, as he turned away with Damon and several other third classmen. Then he looked at them and smiled.

"I know what is in your mind," said Roy; "you're thinking that you'd hate to be Mumford. I don't blame you; so would I."

CHAPTER V

THE THEFT

"THIS Mumford is about the most egotistical fellow I've ever encountered," said Tom, as he and Chot were walking across the parade ground toward their room some time later.

"Yes; it's disgusting," returned Chot. "But it takes all sorts of people to make a world. I don't care what such a fellow thinks or says about me, because I always consider the source, but I do say his treatment of Hoki is contemptible, as well as the spirit he is showing toward Ted Lanham, who is not a Jap."

"You're right, Chot. I only hope he gives you the opportunity to thrash him."

"I shall make the opportunity if he does not," said Chot, grimly — "that is, unless he mends his ways."

"Which he'll never do until someone forces him to respect those things which are right and proper."

"I wonder where Hoki went, anyway?" said Chot, suddenly, looking around, as if he expected to see the Jap. "You know he left the gym right after the mêlée with Mumford."

"Yes; and he was wise. Shows he wants to avoid trouble. I think it's a shame that an American boy should not be magnanimous enough to wish every success to Hoki, when he is trying so hard to get an education and learn our ways and customs. It is a mean spirit to display, to say the least."

"And such things make Hoki feel as though he were unwelcome. I, for one, don't want to see him sneaking around Winton like a criminal, afraid to look the other boys in the face."

"Hoki's no coward."

"No; physically, he's anything but a coward. But no boy, however brave he may be, can stand jibes and taunts about his nationality without either doing something desperate, or avoiding those who make them."

Reaching the barracks, Chot and Tom went up to the room which they occupied jointly.

"It's later than I thought," said Chot, as the sunset gun boomed out its deep note of farewell to the parting day.

The boys threw off their coats and prepared for comfort.

"Yes," replied Tom, rather absently. He seemed to be searching for something. "Er — have you seen my watch, Chot?"

"Your watch? Why, no. Aren't you wearing it?"

"I forgot to take it when we went to the gym. I'm sure I left it lying on the table here."

"Maybe it's fallen down behind."

"No; I've looked."

"Think, Tom; you certainly put it somewhere and forgot about it. Locked it in your trunk, maybe?"

"No; I remember distinctly leaving it on the table there. I can't imagine what's become of it. I'd hate to think anyone in the school would steal it."

"Well, we'd better make some inquiries about the building — you can't afford to lose it."

"I'd hate to. It was a present from my father, you know."

"Well, I'll tell you what we'll do — we'll hunt up the janitor, and — er — by the way, you've dropped your handkerchief."

"Eh? No; my handkerchief is in my pocket, Chot."

Tom looked on the floor, though, and there, sure enough, was a piece of white linen. He picked it up and scrutinized it closely.

"That's funny," he said, with a queer look at Chot.

"What's the matter?"

"This handkerchief belongs to Hoki."

"How do you know?"

"Don't you remember the peculiar Japanese mark which is stamped on all his linen — sort of a family monogram he told us once, if you'll remember?"

"Yes; you're right."

"Well, here it is in the corner."

Chot looked at the handkerchief and saw that Tom had spoken truly. The boys looked at each other and were silent for a moment. Each knew, however, what was passing in the other's mind.

"I don't believe he did it, Tom," said Chot, slowly, after a moment.

"Nor I. But I was thinking how strange it was that he left the gym before we did, for some purpose of which we are not aware. Now, we find his handkerchief here, which would suggest that he had been to our room."

"Well, the best way of all is to find Hoki, and ask him point blank if he has been to our room. If I am any judge of human nature, we'll get a straight answer."

"Let's find him, then," said Tom. "He may be in his room."

They went down the corridor a moment later

and were soon knocking on the door of the room occupied by the Jap and Ted Lanham.

"Come in," said the voice of Hoki, and the boys entered to find the young foreigner gazing moodily out of the window. "Sit down and don't mind me," he advised them. "I get very mad in the gym, and I leave before I have fit of worse temper."

"Was that why you left the gym, Hoki?" Tom asked.

"Surely, yes. I thought I give Mumford plenty for one occasion."

"You most assuredly did. By the way, here's your handkerchief. Did you lose it?"

The Jap took the piece of linen and gazed at it a moment, then his hand instinctively sought his hip pocket. A strange look spread over his face.

"Say, that's funny!" he cried. "It is gone and I did not know it. You find it on the parade ground maybe?"

"No."

"Then in the gym."

"No; in our room," said Tom, looking the Jap straight in the eye.

"Don't you make serious mistake?" he inquired, as if doubting that he understood correctly. "I

have not been in your room since morning, and I not drop my hankychiffer then."

"You have not been in there since morning?" asked Chot.

"No, sirs. That is absolutely definite."

"I'm glad to hear you say so, Hoki, for something has happened, and we thought you might help dispel the mystery."

"You will have to make me understand, sirs."

"I mean that Tom's watch has been stolen!"

"What!" The Jap was on his feet in an instant, his eyes flashing, his face grave. "And — and you think I took it?"

"No; of course not," said Chot, reassuringly. "You know, Hoki, that we trust you thoroughly, and that you have the freedom of the room at all times. But you know you came to the barracks ahead of the rest of us. We thought you might have noticed someone sneaking around the hallway when you came in."

"No," said the Jap. "I am very sorry, but I see no one. I feel very badly over what happen in gym, and come at once to room where I look out of window and think it over. I am sorry about watch, and hope you do not think me suspicious."

"Don't worry about that, Hoki," said Tom.

"We merely want to enlist your aid in finding the thief, for I am positive that the timepiece has been stolen."

"I shall be delighted to make an assist," said Hoki.

"This is not baseball," said Chot, smiling, "but I think you can make the assist just the same."

"I think we'd better report the loss to the commandant," said Tom.

"Let's do a little detective work on our own hook," said Chot. "Here's the proposition in a nutshell. The watch was taken during the time we were at the gym, and Hoki's handkerchief was found on the floor. Hoki says he had lost his handkerchief, but had not been near our room. Thus the case resolves itself into one thing — someone found the handkerchief and stole the watch, leaving the handkerchief so the blame would be thrown on Hoki."

"Then how are we to proceed?" Tom asked.

"First, we must find out who was not at the gym this afternoon, then decide if there are any among the number whom suspicion might be attached to. Some of these plebes are pretty sore at us, you know, over the hazing, and this may be a plan for vengeance, though it's a dirty and despicable way

to get it. I suggest that Hoki keep his eyes and ears open when among the plebes to see if he can find anything hinging upon the disappearance of the watch. A few words dropped by someone may give us a clue. Hoki knows the watch, I think — it was a hunting case, with a dark face and the numerals were in gold. It was a peculiar watch, and he'll know it in a minute if he sees it."

"Do you understand, Hoki?" asked Tom.

"I understand," said the Jap, gravely, "and if I hear what you wish to know it will give me greatest of pleasure to tell you. In the meantime, until such a thing as recovery of your timepiece can be brought about, I ask you to accept my watch, and if yours is never found, you may keep it."

Tom drew quickly back, as the little Jap drew from his pocket a massive silver watch and extended it toward him.

"No, no," he protested. "What do you take me for, Hoki?"

"A gentleman," responded the Jap. "As such as that I ask you to take this timepiece. It belonged to my father, and is very valuable. Then leave this other business to me. To clear my honor I will find the burglar and get back your own valuable watch."

"Why, your honor is not at stake, Hoki!"

"Certainly not — that's absurd," said Chot.

"Gentlemen, I prefer it so. I must find this burglar, then you will know that I did not take watch."

"Nonsense!" cried Chot. "We know you did not take it."

"Put your watch in your pocket, Hoki," said Tom, sternly.

"Very well — thank you, sirs, for the confidence." He let the timepiece fall gently into the pocket of his jacket. "But I shall find this burglar, nevertheless."

"Well, of course, we've no objection to that," said Chot. "Come, Tom; let's go back to our room."

For a moment after the door had closed Hoki stood in silent thought. Then he threw himself across the bed with a little cry, and great sobs began to shake his body.

"Oh, they think I took it — they think I took it," he moaned. "And what can I say? I can say I did not take it. I *did* say I did not take it. But they don't believe me and I can't tell them the truth — I can't tell them the truth!"

CHAPTER VI

ON WINTON OVAL

THERE was a twinge of frost in the air, a sharpness to the wind that was not dulled by the October sun, when the candidates for the eleven, under the watchful eye of Captain Arnim, dashed out on Winton Oval for practice the following day. Harry Mulvaney, the regular Winton coach, had sent word from his health resort in the Catskills that he would be unable to get to Winton this season until after the game with Jackson, and asking Arnim to whip the team in shape as best he could.

With bats and balls barely laid aside, with the incidents of their vacations still vivid in their minds, the cadets now donned jerseys and moleskins, ready for their yearly "stunt" of punting, falling on the ball, and other tactics that served to prepare them for the strenuous campaign that had been mapped out for the Winton eleven.

Before beginning the preliminary practice, Captain Arnim called the candidates before him, and talked long and earnestly, explaining in detail the new rules in force, and complimenting them for their brilliant work the past season.

Modifications of the rules for the new season were few, he said.

"One thing of importance in the new rules," he said, "is the fact that a clearer definition has been made as to the position which an end must assume to be eligible to catch a forward pass. The code concedes a zone behind the scrimmage line, extending back one yard, in which an end may legally play, but while there he is not eligible to catch a forward pass. Either he must play squarely on the line, or he must play at least a yard back of the line, if he is going to receive the ball.

"Of course, any player of the side which passes the ball, who is playing one yard behind the line, may receive it, providing he is qualified under the rules to do so. What the alteration in the rules prevents is an end dropping back more than a foot, and less than a yard, to get a flying start for the ball. That happened frequently in our play last season, and it has naturally puzzled the officials not a little to know which end was eligible to make the catch.

"There have been many opponents, as you all know, to the forward pass, from the time it was first incorporated into the game by the alteration of the playing code. At a meeting of the Rules

Committee this season, many were as emphatic in their objection to it as they had been from the start; but it was agreed by a majority that the play had not detracted from the interest in the sport, but, on the contrary, had increased it, and, therefore, it would be poor policy to legislate against it.

"Old timers, you know, have insisted that the forward pass has invested football with a basket-ball flavor, so to speak. They are against it on the ground that the arms should not have such prominence in the sport. This, however, is far-fetched. American football at its best, is a game in which the arms have as much to do as the legs; for we carry the ball so far as our players are able to do so, without being checked by the opposing teams, and if this is legal, why so much fuss because the ball is occasionally passed forward, that it may be carried further? At any rate, the forward pass remains, with the slight alteration in the code that I have explained."

A short, informal discussion of the rules followed the captain's talk, then the boys dashed out on the oval, and for half an hour did nothing but kick the ball around the field.

Chot and Tom were in the midst of it all, striv-

ing to get muscles limber, and to otherwise prepare for the grueling campaign Arnim had mapped out for them.

After an hour's practice, panting from their exertions, but with a healthy glow on their cheeks, the boys were called in and sent to the gym for a bath and rub down.

The following afternoon two teams were formed, with little or no effort for team strength, but merely to try the men out in various positions. In this way Captain Arnim was soon able to determine those candidates best fitted for the regulars.

"I don't see Dill Newman trying for the eleven," said Pod, as he and Fleet stood watching the play from one side of the Oval.

"No; and you won't see him," was Fleet's reply. "I've always contended that fellow had a streak of yellow in him a yard wide, and his actions during the ball games with Jackson last spring convinced me. He'll not fight in the open any more — if he's still longing for vengeance on any of us, it will come from an unexpected quarter, now, watch what I tell you!"

"What, plotting!" cried Willis Harney, good-naturedly, as he ran out near them after the pigskin a moment later.

"Yes; but you're safe," Fleet responded.

"There goes a good fellow," said Pod — "one of the finest I've ever known. Ever since he acted so gentlemanly about that notice Truem Wright posted on the Winton barracks while we were at Professor Strang's Preparatory School, I've had a warm spot in my heart for him."

Harney had captained the Winton nine the previous spring, and had led it to victory in a series of warmly-contested games with the rival school. He was popular among the cadets, who loved him for his big heart and gentle ways.

"Say, fellows, I understand Arnim has chosen his regular team," said Dan Kirlicks, coming up at this moment.

"Have you any idea who will be on it?"

"I have an idea, but I'm not sure. Chot and Tom are both slated for it, I think, and I'm pretty sure Darcy Mumford will land a berth."

"What! that guy?" cried Fleet, a slight sneer in his voice.

"Yes; he can play football, all right, no matter how deficient he may be in other directions."

Dan's statement that Arnim had chosen his team was true, but the captain did not announce his line-up that day, stating that he would make it known on the following afternoon. This team, then, to be known as the Regs, would be sent against the

strongest scrub team he could put in the field. If any of the regular players did not come up to the mark, there was always a chance for those on the second team to be substituted.

The boys gathered on the Oval the following afternoon, eager to learn the line-up. Captain Arnim soon made it known and the following were his selections:

Murphy, right end; Damon, right tackle; Mumford, right guard; Harney, center; Wright, left guard; Creighton, left tackle; Ardsley, left end; Klimt, quarter-back; Pratt, right half-back; Duncan, left half-back; Arnim, full-back; Denton, Lawford, Bradford, Davis, Siddons, Fiske Murphy and Hoki Nagasuki, substitutes.

Where the little Jap had learned the game nobody knew, but he had an excellent knowledge of football tactics, and, in spite of his diminutive stature, his tackling was both strenuous and picturesque.

There was some dissatisfaction in the ranks of the subs when it was learned that Darcy Mumford had won a place on the regulars. The big plebe had earned the dislike of the three upper classes, for his enlarged opinion of his own abilities, and his overbearing ways. But the cadets gave vent to their feelings only by murmurs, for

Arnim was a strict master, and would not countenance "knocking" in the ranks.

Darcy had shown up well in practice, where his swift running, clever tackling, and straight kicking had won the admiration of the Winton captain. He was evidently familiar with each department of the game, and whatever his personal feelings toward the plebe might be, Arnim was ready to give him a fair chance for the good of the school.

Bradford and Lawford, who had been members of the team the previous year, felt sore at being put with the subs, but Arnim told them frankly that their work lacked class; but that if they could demonstrate that they were still fitted for positions on the Regulars, he would gladly make the shift. Bradford's old position of left guard was now held by Truem Wright; Lawford's by Darcy Mumford.

The next afternoon the Regs tackled the Subs, the latter being reinforced by Kirlicks, Stabler, Teal and Loftus.

Considering their lack of practice, the Regs played a brilliant game, while Wilkes Davis and Fiske Murphy distinguished themselves on the Subs. The Regs were the victors by the score of 11 to 0.

Twice during the contest was the forward pass brought effectively into play by the Regs, which

only served to increase Arnim's confidence in the value of the play.

For three days the Regs and Subs battled, while signals were being perfected, and new plays devised. The scores of the two succeeding games were 6 to 0 and 18 to 0 in favor of the Regs. In the last game they literally swept the Subs off their feet. Their team work was almost perfect, and after the last contest Arnim announced that the line-up of the team would stand as he had first chosen it, with the seven substitutes ready at all times to replace injured men.

A schedule of games with some of the teams along the Hudson had been arranged, and every few days for the next two weeks the Winton Regulars battled in a way that set the blood of the cadets tingling in their veins.

First, there was Catskill, with Winton winning 11 to 0; Poughkeepsie, with Winton winning 6 to 5; Fishkill, with Winton winning 22 to 6; and Newburgh, with Winton winning 17 to 10.

Three of the four games were played on the Winton grounds. The game with Newburgh, however, was fought in the enemy's territory, before a large crowd which rooted tooth and nail for a victory over the cadets.

In the meantime, reports of the wonderful team

Jackson had put in the field were reaching the Winton boys from various sources. Winton's old-time rival, it was reported, again under the leadership of the aggressive Dave Hardy, had made a phenomenal record against seven of the smaller teams, scoring a shut-out in every game, while the Jackson scores had frequently soared above the fifty mark. There had been a slight change in the Jackson line-up since the previous year, and the Jackson eleven was now touted in all quarters as a veritable stone wall. It was also reported that Jackson had discarded the forward pass, preferring a new line of tactics devised by Hardy, and said to have been used with flattering success in the games with the smaller teams.

According to an agreement made with Jackson some time before the last year's game, the yearly contest between the schools should be played on the grounds of the victorious team. And now, with the Jackson game but three days off, the Winton authorities began overhauling grounds and grandstand, preparatory to handling the large crowd that might always be expected to attend an event of this nature.

From across the river Professor Pinchum sent word to reserve forty seats for him and Mrs. Pinchum, and the thirty-eight girls who contributed

to the support and maintenance of the professor's renowned Select Academy for Young Ladies.

"That means you'll see Lucy Pendleton again, Chotsy," said Fleet, sticking his head in the door of the room occupied by Chot and Tom one afternoon, a broad grin on his face.

"Well, you and Tom will see her, too, won't you?" growled Chot.

"Oh, surely; but you'll monopolize her company like you always do. Anyway, she's not greatly interested in Tom and me. Is she, Tom?"

"Not so anybody could notice it," was Tom's reply. "She has always shown a preference for Chot on account of his good looks."

"Pshaw! We're all from Mortonville, and Lucy is merely an old schoolmate of ours," said Chot. "She treats you fellows every bit as good as she does me, so I wish you'd shut up."

"All right, bo," said Fleet. "Sorry you get on your ear over such trivial matters. But when you and Lucy are having a confidential chat after the game Thursday, just remember what I've said," and with a broad wink, and a significant nod of the head, he went on down the corridor, slamming the door.

CHAPTER VII

THE GAME WITH JACKSON

Winton:	*Positions:*	*Jackson:*
Murphy	Right End	Madway
Damon	Right Tackle	Stedman
Mumford	Right Guard	Bedley
Harney	Center	Thwing
Wright	Left Guard	Peple
Creighton	Left Tackle	McNeil
Ardsley	Left End	Mixner
Klimt	Quarter-back	Hammond
Pratt	Right half-back	Fisher
Duncan	Left half-back	Irving
Arnim	Full-back	Hardy

THE afternoon of the day chosen for the annual battle between Winton and Jackson was clear and bright, with just enough tang in the air to make exercise a pleasure, if not a necessity.

Jackson had arrived on the morning train, bringing half of their fellow-students as rooters, all brimming over with exuberance, and confident that Jackson would wipe out the defeat of the preceding year. Each boy wore a miniature pennant of blue and white on his coat or sweater, while in his hand

he carried a larger flag of the same colors. Tin horns, "squawkers," and various and sundry other instruments whose sole purpose for existence was the making of noise, were in evidence on all sides, and added their quota to the din in the two hours preceding the game.

Crowds began to fill the grandstand and bleachers on Winton Oval as early as one-thirty; but as the game was not scheduled to begin until three, it was nearly an hour later when the rival teams appeared before the assemblage. Each received a rousing demonstration — Winton's being the greater because she had more rooters and sympathizers present.

Chot had seen Lucy Pendleton but a moment before taking his place on the field with the team; but that moment had sufficed to let him know that the girl had an important piece of news for him, and would arrange to see him at the end of the game. Chot wondered if it had anything to do with her father and the mine in which he was jointly interested with Fleet, Tom and Lucy, then decided it had, for the look on her face when she mentioned it showed clearly that it was something of a serious nature.

Now, as he took his place on the field for prac-

tice, he filled his lungs with a deep breath, and looked up in the grandstand where Professor Pinchum's girls added a touch of color and brightness to the crowd. Somewhere among those girls he knew Lucy was watching, and somehow the thought made him more eager for the fray.

There was a short time of practice for each team, then the two captains, with the referee, Cadet Captain John Lorry, of the fourth class, stepped aside for a brief consultation. Then, finally, a bright coin went shimmering into the atmosphere.

"Heads!" cried Captain Dave Hardy.

"Heads it is!" announced Cadet Lorry. "It is Jackson's choice."

And so Hardy gave Winton the ball and stood on the defense, with the wind at his back.

The whistle blew sharply.

Captain Arnim poised for a moment, then shot forward with quickening strides toward the ball. The next instant it went boring into the teeth of the wind, far over in Jackson's territory.

It was Irving, the Jackson left half-back, who caught the pigskin and returned it cleanly.

Chot Duncan, waiting, saw his opportunity, and hastened to place himself in position to take the ball. As he made ready to seize the pigskin, he

saw, out of the corner of his eye, two men bearing down on him at top speed. They were Hardy's end men, ready to leap upon him and slam him to the ground if possible.

Even as the ball landed with a thud in Chot's arms, one of these men shot out on a long, desperate tackle.

Chot did not signal for a fair catch, but, instead, made a leap into the air, and the tackler shot beneath him along the ground. Off to the side Chot then leaped, and the other tackler seemed to have him foul. But the lithe cadet wiggled out of his grasp in some manner, and sent him sprawling full length on the ground. Then, hugging the ball tightly, Chot shot off on a tangent, just as another Jackson man closed in on him.

Chot's tactics came as a surprise to his fellow players. With the Jackson men so close upon him, they had expected him to raise his hand for a fair catch and a free kick, and his failure to do this, and the clever manner in which he eluded the first two tacklers, gave them a thrill of real excitement.

Arnim charged after Chot, but he was not near enough to act as interferer, and Chot's rapid strides were widening the distance each passing second. Farther and farther toward the side of

the field Chot was forced by the Jackson men, until it looked as if he would be driven over the side-line. Then, suddenly, he shifted his course, dodging first this way and that. Eluding the nearest foe, he shifted the ball to his other arm, and with his free arm made a sweeping stroke, which served to beat down the hands of another tackler. He slipped through the hands of a third man, when it seemed as if the latter had been successful in stopping his headlong rush.

On down the field toward the Jackson goal Chot dashed, while from the grandstand and bleachers great shouts of approval rang out. Behind him charged his team-mates, but hardly close enough to render much assistance.

It was the most astonishing one-man play ever seen on Winton Oval — such a play as sets the rooters wild with enthusiasm and frequently takes the heart out of the opposing team. And above all, it had come as a complete surprise to the players of the rival eleven.

Even Tom, fleet runner that he was, was unable to get close enough to Chot to render him assistance. About the Jackson goal Irving, Hardy and Bedley got the Winton man in a pocket. He could run no farther, and with ten yards still to be made,

Hardy dashed toward him. From another angle Irving came charging along.

Crouching low, Chot hurled himself recklessly at Hardy, who was upset by the fierce onslaught and went to the ground with a crash, but not before he had thrown both arms around Chot's body at the hips. Crawling, squirming, Chot moved toward the goal-line, dragging Hardy with him. Then the watching spectators saw Irving slam himself with all his strength on the Winton man's back. Then Bedley leaped on Irving!

Only three yards to be covered! So near the goal and yet so far!

Chot rose half-blinded to his feet, as the players uncovered, and refused the proferred aid of his team-mates. His head swam in a dizzy fashion, but after a moment he rallied and walked slowly back up the field.

"Good boy!" Chot heard Arnim cry. "That was a dandy run!" and a moment later he had lined up with the Winton players, more determined than ever.

Then came another surprise for the Winton players. When everyone expected to see the ball go to Pratt, a fresh man, for an effort to finish the touchdown, Harney snapped it to Klimt who passed

it quickly to Chot. Appreciating the long run the latter had made, Arnim had decided that Chot was entitled to a chance to finish his goal. The Winton captain was always ready to give his men credit for a good play.

Then the Jackson line came surging up. The interference of Hardy and his men was almost perfect, and lightning-like in its rapidity. Harney, Wright and Creighton united to break a hole in the Jackson center. Tom dashed up and joined them, followed an instant later by Chot. Then Captain Arnim crowded up against Chot, while Darcy Mumford, having reached the center of the Jackson defense, suddenly seized Chot by the shoulders and yanked with all his might.

Darcy was a strapping young fellow, with plenty of strength, and Chot shot forward like he'd been fired from a cannon. There was a sudden downfall of men, with Chot, the ball clasped tightly in his arm, pinned fast beneath.

The crowd held its breath, awaiting a decision as to the result of the play. Then, as the players arose and scattered, and Referee Lorry dashed forward and raised his hand, the Winton cadets fairly made the welkin ring.

The ball was over the line!

"That fellow Duncan is a wonder!" cried someone in the grandstand.

"I'm surprised you haven't found that out before," said Fleet, who, with Pod and Dan was sitting near by. Fleet's voice was hoarse from shouting, and the words fairly wheezed through his teeth.

"Oh, there's nothing so wonderful about that," said Dill Newman, always ready to talk disparagingly of anything the Comrades did. "Just a piece of rare good luck — that's all."

"You give me a pain in the eye," cried Pod, as he gave the big fourth classman a contemptuous glance. "A lot your opinion amounts to, anyway."

"Don't get sassy!" advised Dill. "Remember you're only a yearling!"

"As if I'm likely to forget it! And *you* remember this is the day of the big game, and class lines are laid aside for the time being. Put that in your pipe and smoke it! You know what I think of you without my telling you!"

"Oh, mamma!" muttered Ted Lanham. "Wasn't that a hot shot, though? I wish I had as much pluck for my size as Pod Meelick has."

"Look!" cried Fleet, suddenly, and the atten-

tion of everyone became centered on the gridiron again. "Arnim's going to give Chot a chance to kick. If he makes it that will give him a complete touchdown."

This was true. Tom Pratt was the man decided upon by the Winton captain to hold the ball. If the team of Duncan and Pratt could not make a successful kick, who could? he thought.

Tom measured the distance from the spot where the ball had been caught to the goal-line. He took note of the slight angle at which the pigskin must fly in order to pass over the cross-bar. In another instant he was in position, holding the ball for Chot to kick.

The Winton players assumed their positions, ready and alert, while behind the line crouched Dave Hardy and his men, nerves tense, prepared to charge the instant the ball touched the ground.

There was a breathless hush among the crowd — a brief pause, as Tom suddenly shifted the ball into perfect position. Chot started. Three swift strides he made, and then, as the referee gave the signal that the ball had touched the ground, he brought himself into a position to kick.

Out from the Jackson line shot several men in an effort to block the ball, but Chot had kicked

straight and true, and upward and over the cross-bar the ball went sailing.

Chot Duncan had finished his goal, and the score stood: Winton 6; Jackson 0.

Jackson, the ball in her possession, her men grim and determined, lined up for the kick-off. Propelled by the muscular leg of Captain Hardy, the pigskin shot far over into Winton territory.

Harney got the ball and made the return. Then a surprising thing happened; through an almost perfect "fake" play on the right end, the Jackson men drew the majority of the Winton players in that direction, and before the red and orange realized what had happened, Fisher, the Jackson right half-back, shot around the left end with the ball. How Fisher had received the pigskin, or got into position to run, without being observed, no Winton man could tell. This, no doubt, was one of the new plays Hardy had boasted he would "spring" on his rivals during the game.

Down the field dashed Fisher, with Wright and Creighton barring his way. Truem sprang forward in an effort to tackle, but Fisher, by a neat dodge, eluded his grasp. Creighton shot toward him on an angle, but the fleet-footed Jackson man dashed past him by a hair's breadth, and an instant

later the pigskin had been placed between the goal-posts for the quickest, cleanest touchdown seen on Winton Oval in many years.

The Jackson men were jubilant now. A game tied is as good as won, they figured.

Captain Hardy himself made the kick, and sent the ball squarely over the cross-bar, tying the score.

The teams lined up again, and again Jackson showed a superior knowledge of the game. Again did Dave Hardy bring new tactics into play, and before the Winton men had figured them out, Hardy was in a position to kick a field goal.

Away into the air the ball sailed, straight and true, and the hearts of the Winton boys were in their mouths as the pigskin went flying over the cross-bar.

Under the new rules the field goal counted three, which gave Jackson a decided advantage.

Before the teams could line up for another kick-off, the referee's whistle announced the end of the first half.

The score stood: Jackson 9, Winton 6.

CHAPTER VIII

THE END OF THE STRUGGLE

"Now, listen, fellows," said Captain Arnim, as he gathered his men about him in one corner of the gym, "we can't let Jackson go through us again like she did in the first half. That's not what we're here for! I don't want to make you feel badly, but if it hadn't been for Duncan's great run at the beginning of the game, we'd have been shut out. Now, you boys all want to go to New York to meet Columbia. That's the greatest honor that has ever been placed within our grasp. I want you to go. I want to go myself. I believe we can beat that New York bunch to a standstill. But first we've got to earn the chance! Remember that! I want every man to go into the second half with blood in his eye. If we don't pull this game out of the fire, Jackson will be the team to go to the Polo Grounds next month — not us! Now, keep thinking that over while you're playing, and let's go in and *win!* That's all!"

With a shrug, the Winton captain turned on his heel and made for the door.

Feeling keenly the reprimand, delivered in the most gentle manner, but none the less forceful for that, the Winton players returned to the Oval, fierce determination written on their faces. Every man on the team now recognized the truth of the early season reports that Jackson was a veritable stone wall. Only Chot's surprise early in the game, and his fleet-footedness, and knack of avoiding tacklers, had enabled Winton to get a "look-in" on the game.

The referee's whistle soon sent the players into the fray again to the accompaniment of the cries of the rooters for both teams, and the wild waving of orange and red and blue and white flags.

After two minutes of play, during which time Winton bucked the Jackson line in a truly reckless fashion, Winton got the ball.

A quick signal went from Arnim to Ardsley, as the former prepared to kick off. Then the Winton captain kicked with such judgment and accuracy that the ball sailed off to the left, and gave Ardsley an opportunity of following it so closely that he was right on hand when Fisher prepared to re-reive the pigskin.

Fisher planted himself in a position to receive the ball, and shot one quick glance toward the charging

Ardsley. Then his hand went up on a level with the top of his head, as if he meant to signal for a fair catch. But there it stopped; therefore, the signal was invalid. It was a trick on Fisher's part intended to cause the Winton man to hesitate about tackling.

In another instant Fisher had the ball and had leaped swiftly to one side, passing Ardsley as he shot forward, arms outstretched. Fisher's play was clearly in violation of the rules; but the referee had evidently not considered it in the light of a deception, for he allowed it to go on.

Fisher dodged past Creighton, the next man in his path, and sped on, with three of his team-mates alongside as interferers, crossed the center of the field, and bore down with increasing speed toward the Winton goal.

Darcy Mumford tried to get at Fisher, but one of the interferers successfully blocked his way, and the two collided and went to the ground.

Racing across to cut off the speedy Jackson man were Tom Pratt and Captain Arnim.

Fisher's interferer picked out Tom as the man to be most feared, and though Tom finally threw the man off, he was too late to be of any assistance in stopping Fisher.

But Arnim had not been stopped. He had dodged the remaining interferer, and now sped on, cool, determined, yet tense with the strain of the moment, knowing full well what would be expected of him by the Winton cadets. He charged at Fisher like a demon. The Jackson man suddenly swerved, thinking to elude his foe, but the Winton captain was a quick thinker, and divining the runner's purpose, calculated just how far Fisher would run in the new direction. Then he shot forward with outstretched arms, and like hooks of steel his hands seized Fisher's hips and slipped downward. With a thud the Jackson man fell to the ground.

Then from the crowd went up a great shout.

"Arnim! Arnim! He's all right!" cried the cadets, and Winton colors waved backward and forward in frenzied delight.

No one could deny that the Winton captain had prevented Jackson from scoring at the very beginning of the second half.

The Jackson players lost no time in forming for another attack. But the defenders of the red and orange were quite as ready. Arnim's great tackle had put confidence into their hearts.

Jackson charged with her old-time persistency, and the Winton line bulged and gave way, until the

enemy had pushed and dragged the man with the ball a good eight yards.

A quick line-up followed, with another Jackson attack. But, swift though this was, Tom Pratt somehow broke through the blue and white line, and nailed the man with the ball, sweeping him off his feet and carrying him back for a loss of three yards.

"That's the ticket!" cried Captain Arnim. "Hold 'em, boys — hold 'em!"

Jackson tried the criss-cross, but the play was anticipated by Winton and failed to result in any gain. It was the third down. Captain Hardy of the Jackson team retreated some distance behind his line. Apparently he was about to kick.

Captain Arnim, divining what was about to happen, snapped a quick signal to his men. The signal meant: "He's going to try the forward pass." This was rather astonishing, too, as it had been reported that the play had been discarded by the Jackson team.

Sure enough, Jackson tried the forward pass. They performed it properly, but Pratt secured the ball at the moment when it seemed dropping into the clutches of the man who had been sent forward to receive it. When stopped, Tom had taken care

of the ground that might have been gained by that pass, and Winton had the ball.

The teams lined up again. There was a signal, a sharp, twisting movement of men, then the Winton line bulged through the Jackson line at one point, led by Chot Duncan, while Tom went around the end, carrying the ball. When he was downed, he had scored eleven yards, and again a cheer was wafted across the field from the grandstand and bleachers.

Shifting her play rapidly from one style to another, Winton continued to plow through the enemy's ranks. Gain after gain she made, and the cadets at last began to realize that it was Jackson who was now being outclassed. Over into Jackson territory the ball was carried. Onward it was pushed toward the goal-line of the blue and white.

On their thirty-five yard line Dave Hardy and his Jackson warriors finally succeeded in checking and holding the onrushing orange and red.

Arnim was forced to kick. But the wind had been growing stronger as the afternoon advanced, and made it impossible for the Winton man to send it over the cross-bar for a field goal.

Jackson got the ball again, and resumed her assaults. This time the blue and white executed a

forward pass with good results, when held for the third down. An end run gave them ten yards more. Over the center of the field the Jackson men carried the ball, advancing rapidly into Winton territory.

The crowd was wrought up to a great pitch of excitement, and the Winton cadets sent cheer after cheer ringing out across the Oval in the hope of encouraging the defenders of the orange and red.

Still Dave Hardy and his Jackson men marched on. Then came the feature of the game. Hardy had given a quick signal to his men for a trick play of his own devising — one which he had not yet tried, and which he counted on for a large gain, if not a goal — when the ball was fumbled and went bounding away along the ground.

Right through the Jackson line then, charged Tom Pratt, sending Thwing to the earth and leaping over his prostrate form. Before a Jackson player could get near the pigskin, Tom had scooped it up cleanly, deftly, and the next instant was off down the field, while the grandstand and bleachers, startled into silence at the rapidity of the play, suddenly burst into a great roar of applause.

Closing in swiftly on Tom, then, came Dave Hardy, a look of grim determination on his face,

ready to leap and tackle. Behind him Tom heard the thudding feet of the other Jackson men, and of the Winton team which had dashed forward almost as a unit to act as interferers.

Tom, his eye on Hardy, began swerving away. The Jackson man came up with a rush, but when he was about to leap, Tom swerved again. Hardy saw the movement when too late, but though he could not tackle, he hooked out his right arm, hoping thus to bring Tom to the turf.

Just in the nick of time Tom realized what Hardy was about, and bending his body inward at the waist, he swept by, the Jackson captain's fingers just grazing his side. Hardy stumbled a moment, then pitched headlong to the ground, while Tom, now unimpeded, swept down the field and planted the pigskin squarely between the goal-posts of the blue and white!

Arnim, coming up with the vanguard of the players, slapped Tom heartily on the back.

"Great! Great!" he cried. "Now for a kick and we've got 'em! Duncan, hold the ball for Pratt."

The wind sang across the field in a perfect gale, as Chot obeyed the instructions of his chief. It would take great judgment, he knew, to send the

ball over the bar in the face of that sweeping breeze.

There was a hush. Behind their line the Jackson men stood poised, ready to charge. Chot shifted the ball in his hands and began lowering it slowly to the ground. Then Tom started. Three steps he made before his toe smashed against the skin of the ball.

Up it shot, and a sinking feeling took hold of the Winton men, for the ball went sweeping off to one side in the teeth of the wind. Then it was seen that Tom had calculated to a nicety the force of the gale; for the pigskin suddenly began to curve, was caught by the wind and swept around in a graceful arc until it plunged squarely over the cross-bar! It was a pretty kick and the wild cheering of the cadets attested their appreciation.

Then, before Jackson had hardly realized what had happened, and was preparing to return to the fray, the referee's whistle announced the end of the game, with Winton the victor by the score of 12 to 9!

CHAPTER IX

A TALK WITH LUCY

CHOT and Tom hurried off to the gym, away from the demonstrative cadets who were bent on carrying them around the field on their shoulders.

"I want to get into my other clothes," said Chot. "I've promised to meet Lucy. I think she wants to go down to Stockdale on the night train to see her aunt, Mrs. Dashworth. Want to go along?"

"Well, it will be lonesome for you coming back — that's all," Tom replied. "If you say the word, I'll go."

"Nothing would please me better."

As they reached the side door of the gym they saw the Jackson boys hurrying toward the depot where a train for the north was due in ten minutes. They waved their hands gaily at Chot and Tom, and a feeling of sympathy for the boys who had fought hard but had met defeat, surged over the chums.

"A fine lot of fellows," said Chot, and Tom nodded.

Fleet came hurrying up, out of breath.

"Lucy says she'll meet you near the chapel,

Chot," he said. "Professor and Mrs. Pinchum are leaving at once with the other girls. They're to send to Stockdale for Lucy to-morrow."

"Want to go to Mrs. Dashworth's with Lucy, Tom and I, Fleet?"

"Glory, I'll be tickled to pieces! Er — sure I won't be in the way?" he added, with a sly grin.

"In the way!" Chot exclaimed. "If I had a brick I'd throw it at you!"

"Never mind searching for one. Have we time to change our clothes?"

"Yes. The train isn't due until 5:30. It reaches Stockdale at 5:40. We can walk back and get here in plenty of time for the 'blow-out' in the mess hall."

"Gee! I'd hate to miss that," said Fleet, smacking his lips in keen anticipation of the good things he knew would be provided. "I understand that the commandant has done himself proud."

"He always does," said Tom, "so that's nothing new."

Twenty minutes later the Comrades, feeling fine after a bath and rub-down, and attired in their uniforms, met Lucy at the chapel and took her to the depot.

"You said you had something to tell me, Lucy,"

said Chot, as they walked along. "I know you won't mind Tom and Fleet."

"On the contrary, they are as much concerned in this as you," returned the girl. "As you have no doubt surmised, it is of my father I wish to speak. I have written him four times during the last six weeks without receiving a response."

"That's strange," said Chot. "Sure you addressed the letters properly?"

"Why, yes; I sent them to the address I've always used. He has never failed to receive my letters before."

"When I come to think of it," said Chot, "your father never acknowledged receipt of the check for $1000 sent him before we left Mortonville this summer. That constituted Fleet's share in the mine, you know? The check was returned to the Mortonville bank, though, showing he received it all right."

"I was rather glad to get that stock off my hands," said the girl.

"I knew you would be. You know we'll be very careful of your interests."

Chot did not want to tell Lucy that they had taken her stock in order to have a three-fifths interest against Mr. Pendleton's two-fifths, fearing

treachery on the part of her father. It sounded too brutal.

"With this stock in our hands we control the situation and will thus be able to protect not only ourselves, but your father should he by any chance fall in with a band of unscrupulous promoters, whose object would be to beat us all," was what he did say.

"I am perfectly satisfied with what you have done," said Lucy. "Make your mind easy on that score. Fleet will be better able to do his part in developing the property than I. And now, Chot, I want to ask a favor of you. Write to my father and see if you can get a reply. There might be some good reason for his silence."

"I'll gladly do that, Lucy. I'll do my best to find out just what is the matter."

The Comrades boarded the train with Lucy some minutes later, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing her safely housed at Mrs. Dashworth's cottage in Stockdale, four and one-half miles south of Winton.

Here they were warmly greeted by Lucy's aunt, and forced to sit down to tea and fruit cake. They declined her invitation to spend the evening, however, and bidding good-bye to she and Lucy,

crossed the street to the railroad track for their walk back to the school.

Not even the arduous labors of the afternoon could keep Chot and Tom from hurrying, and Fleet, with his surplus flesh, found some difficulty in keeping up with them. The air was cool and bracing, however, and the four and one-half miles seemed as nothing, even to him.

It was just dark when they reached the barracks and went to their rooms to make ready for the festivities in the mess hall.

Commandant Cullum never failed to celebrate an athletic victory with a banquet, and in this manner had come to be greatly admired and respected by the cadets.

This night was no exception to the rule. In a neat speech the commandant thanked the football team for their fine work, complimenting them on what he termed a great battle against heavy odds.

"The men composing the Jackson eleven were larger than you," he said, "and for this reason, if for no other, you deserve great credit for the way you successfully charged the enemy's line."

He hoped, he said, that the team would be as fortunate in New York.

"Remember, Columbia is not invulnerable. Re-

ports may reach you of the great team they have assembled, and of the sensational plays they have devised. But my advice is to pay no attention to what you hear. Perfect yourselves in the tactics you displayed against Jackson to-day, and I am sure that Columbia will be the team to do the worrying."

He was loudly cheered as he sat down.

Captain Arnim, then, in response to the repeated cries of the cadets, made a few remarks in which he echoed the commandant's sentiments with regard to the game with Columbia.

"It will be the greatest battle Winton has ever had," he said, impressively, "and I know we are going to do ourselves proud. A victory over Columbia this season will get us games with Yale and Harvard another year, to say nothing of the long-sought battle with West Point. Those government cadets down the river don't like to associate with us, because our military training is merely incident to our education, but if we can't show them tricks in drilling —"

"But we can — we can!" interrupted several voices.

"If we can't show them tricks in drilling," continued Arnim, smiling, "I believe we can teach them

a few things in the various branches of athletics, if they ever give us an opportunity to try."

The banquet broke up about eleven, and the cadets quickly sought their rooms, with the realization that another great football game had passed into history.

A holiday having been declared, on which occasion lights were not required to be out until midnight, Fleet and Pod gathered for a chat in the room of Chot and Tom.

"I heard a piece of news this afternoon, Chot," said Pod, as he crawled up on Tom's trunk and stretched out in a half-reclining position.

"Tell it to me," said Chot.

"Darcy Mumford is going to challenge you to fight."

"Well, I can't say the news is unexpected."

"It seems he's sore because he didn't have a better chance to distinguish himself to-day."

"Well, I wasn't responsible for that," said Chot. "For that matter, I thought he did a lot to-day. He certainly pulled me across the goal-line in that mix-up at the beginning of the game."

"Yes; but that's because Arnim's eyes were on him. He couldn't very well help that."

"Yes, and I forgot to tell you, Chot, that Mum-

ford is organizing a roller polo team," said Fleet. "I understand he's going to ask you to defend the honor of the yearlings."

"Well, fortunately we have had our team picked out for some time, and are in fairly good practice. Are there any others honors that this brave young man covets at Winton? If so, let's be prepared for him."

As the recognized leader of the yearlings, Chot did not intend that the plebes should be victorious in any branch of sport.

"Well," said Pod, "Ted Lanham said to-day that if Mumford fails to get your scalp at everything else, he has one more card up his sleeve."

"What is it?" asked Chot, with rather mild interest.

"Fencing."

"What!" cried Chot, starting up. "Fencing! By cracky, if he challenges me to a battle with foils he'll certainly hit my weakest point. Does he claim to be a master of fence?"

"I think so. At least, he has made the assertion on several occasions that he was 'brought up on it,' — whatever that means!"

For a moment, Chot was silent, thinking. Then he said:

"Fellows, there's only one thing for me to do. I've got to learn to fence!"

"I surely wish you would," said Fleet.

"Well, I will. Of course, I've used the foils a little, but fencing has never appealed to me in the way other sports have. As a consequence, my education along that line has been sadly neglected. But, if you recollect, Wilkes Davis is considered one of the finest amateur fencers in America. I'll get him to show me a few tricks of the trade."

"Secretly, of course," Tom suggested.

"Naturally. I don't want Mumford to think I'm trying to get ready for him. That might lead to a challenge before I'm prepared. No — I'll have to devise some method of practicing in secret, and it will be somewhat of a problem."

"You might use the old fort," suggested Fleet.

"No, because there's always a crowd hanging around to see what you're going to do. Someone would be sure to give the snap away. The fort is out of the question. But I'll think the matter over. There's plenty of time yet."

"Well, let's get to bed, little one," said Fleet, arising with a yawn.

"I'm with you," Pod responded, "but — er — speaking of ice —"

"Now, who said anything about ice?" Fleet demanded. "Boo! You make me shiver!"

"Well, speaking of it, anyway," Pod went on, "does anyone know why it is so much higher this winter?"

"No — we don't want to know, either."

"I'll tell you, anyway. Because it's worth its weight in cold."

"Get out before I throw you out," growled Tom.

"Oh, I'm going," grinned the little fellow, as he ran quickly to the door. He went out into the corridor, but stuck his head in again to remark: "By the way, a cigar may be the best in the world, but someday it will meet its match!"

Before going to bed Chot sat down and wrote to Pendleton, as he had promised Lucy he would.

"I don't expect a reply," he said to Tom. "But it will at least satisfy her."

"If you want my opinion in the matter, Pendleton has spent Fleet's thousand, and the mine hasn't been touched," said Tom.

Chot was thoughtful for a moment as he tapped on the table with the end of his fountain pen.

"Maybe you're right, Tom — maybe you're right," he said, at last. Then with a grave shake of the head: "Poor Lucy!"

CHAPTER X

WHAT HAPPENED TO MUMFORD

CHOT expected to receive a challenge from Darcy Mumford the next day, but none came. On the way to the gym with Fleet in the late afternoon, however, he chanced to pass the plebe leader, and Darcy, with a stare, that fairly vibrated hate, passed on. His anger was evidently getting beyond bounds.

"That fellow, Mumford is crazy with the heat," said Fleet, as he and Chot passed on. "He's got some sort of a pipe dream about your doing him dirt, when, in reality, you've never done a thing, except tell him not to pick on that little Jap."

Chot shook his head.

"It's too much for me," he said. "All I can do is try to gratify his whims. If he wants to fight, fight — if he wants to fence, fence."

"By the way, while we're speaking of fencing, have you talked things over with Wilkes?"

"Yes; I mentioned it the first thing this morning. I shall have my first lesson within the next fifteen minutes. Want to go?"

"Oh, mother, can a bird fly?"

"Sh!" said Chot, mysteriously. "Follow me!"

Around the end of the gym they went, across Winton Oval, and straight toward a patch of trees, half a mile beyond. This spot was known as Walnut Grove, and here, on frequent occasions, parties from Winton or Stockdale came for an outing.

"Do you suppose anyone saw us?" asked Fleet, casting a furtive glance over his shoulder as they entered the deep shadows of the trees.

"What does it matter?" replied Chot. "They won't know why we're here."

"Hello, fellows!" cried a voice, suddenly, and greatly to Fleet's surprise, Wilkes Davis arose from his seat on a fallen tree and confronted them. In his hand he carried a long, slender bundle, which, when unwrapped, disclosed a pair of rapiers.

"These are my own private foils, Chot," said the lanky lad, "and providing Mumford challenges you to a fencing contest, I would suggest that you stipulate that each man is to use his own weapon. That will make it look as though you had one of your own. In the meantime, you can take one of these to your room and keep it as long as you like. No one at Winton knows that I have these foils, as I have always used those belonging to the gym."

"A good suggestion, Wilkes," said Chot.

Then both boys shed their coats and handed them to Fleet.

"I've never fenced with you, Chot," said Wilkes, "but I take it from what you've told me that you are familiar with the rudiments of the game. So get on your guard, and we'll proceed cautiously while I feel you out."

Chot nodded. With his left hand describing a graceful curve in the air, he threw his foil forward, his right leg slightly crooked at the knee, his left extended rigid behind him.

"That's the boy!" exclaimed Wilkes, admiringly.

The foils crossed. There was a moment's cautious fencing, then Chot, greatly to Fleet's amazement, scored a point.

"Well, well, well," cried the fleshy lad. "Look out, Wilkes, that Chot doesn't teach *you*."

"He scored a clean point," said Wilkes, laughing, "and right at a moment when I wasn't expecting it."

Then Wilkes became suddenly active. He began to score on Chot almost at will, using strokes Chot had never heard of, and against which he was helpless.

"Now, Chot," he said, after a moment, "I'll show you how to block that last stroke."

"Show me how to block the others, too," said Chot, eagerly.

"I will, but you can't learn them all in one lesson."

Wilkes then coached him until he was able to block successfully one of the most difficult strokes. Then Wilkes went into detail about another stroke, at the end of which time over an hour had been consumed, and both boys were panting from their exertions. It was decided to call the fencing off until the following day.

Chot and Fleet walked leisurely back toward the gym, while Wilkes, going down by the river, was able to get to his room unnoticed. A little later he joined Chot, Tom and Fleet on the parade ground, and together they entered the gym.

"Here, Duncan, just the fellow I'm looking for," cried Captain Arnim, as he spied Chot. "Come over here. I want to talk to you."

His face wore a serious expression as he led Chot aside.

"I understand from very good authority, Duncan, that this plebe, Mumford, is going to challenge you to a fight. Now, I want you to do me a favor. Don't let this mill come off until after our game in New York. It's only ten days away and I'm sure

you'll be willing to do this for the good of the team."

"Perfectly willing," Chot replied, "but whether Mumford will be as willing is another matter. You'd better see him, and make sure the challenge doesn't come until after the game, for just as sure as I get it, I'm going to fight him. Don't worry about me anyway — I expect to be in perfect trim for the battle with Columbia."

"I wasn't thinking of you, Duncan, but of Mumford. I have no doubt that you'll be the victor. But suppose Mumford is laid up at the time of the game?"

"I don't anticipate such consequences."

"But suppose he is?" persisted the captain.

"Well, if you think there is any possibility of it, the best thing to do is to see Mumford and ask him to withhold his challenge until we return from New York. There is nothing in reason I would not do for the team, as you know, Arnim, but this fellow has been passing remarks about me on the parade ground and in the gym here. Some of them are positively insulting, and they've got to stop. If he doesn't bring matters to a crisis soon, I shall. But I promise to take no action until after the game with Columbia."

"I suppose that's all I can reasonably expect of you, Duncan. Thank you. I'll see Mumford."

Arnim evidently had no trouble in finding Darcy, for not ten minutes later the captain passed Chot, and with a significant nod, said:

"It's all right; Mumford promises to leave you alone until after the game. Tried to convey the impression that he was doing me a big favor," and Arnim smiled.

"Well, you may depend on me under those circumstances," said Chot.

But a little incident occurred at roll call the following morning, which showed how little reliance could be put on Mumford's word.

As at West Point, the first ceremony of the day at Winton is roll call. As the sound of the morning gun reaches the barracks, the cadets spring out of bed to the stirring notes of the reveille. As the gun bellows forth its thunderous tone, "Old Glory" goes fluttering to the top of the flagstaff on the parade ground.

All this is an old story for the members of the second, third and fourth classes. It becomes second nature to them. What matters if, stumbling out of bed in the early morning light, the cadet butts into the other occupant of the room, perhaps upsetting the wash basin, or causing other damage

before he finally slips into his clothes and makes a headlong dash for the stairs? It grows to be routine, like everything else connected with a military school.

To the plebe, however, all this is strange, and many are the blunders he makes before he becomes thoroughly initiated into the ways and means of getting into line in front of the barracks without loss of time.

On the morning in question, among those who "fell in" as the last notes of the drum reverberated over the parade ground, were Chot and Tom, who, being in their second year at Winton, were well versed in the ways of getting down "just in the nick of time."

At the very last moment plebes came running from both entrances of the barracks. It was just before the line was "dressed," and the cadets were still talking in low tones, and turning as they pleased. As a consequence, every eye was on the nearest doorway, when, with a clattering that sounded like a dozen feet coming down the stairs at once, Darcy Mumford dashed wildly out, an expression on his face that told only to well that he realized his tardiness.

There had been a heavy rain during the night, and some ten feet in front of the barracks door, at

the edge of the concrete sidewalk, was a shallow pool of water, several feet in extent. Darcy, dashing blindly ahead, with only one thought — to get into line and save a reprimand — did not see it. Every cadet in the long line did, however. There was no warning shout, but every cadet craned his neck forward to see whether Darcy would discover the pool in time to jump it.

He did not! He saw it when too late, and the awkward movement he made to escape it, served only to increase his danger. He struck the edge of the water, his feet shot out from under him with lightning-like rapidity, and he sat down with a splash in the middle of the pool!

Puffing from his exertions, an expression of mortification on his face, the leader of the plebes sat and gazed about him in helpless amazement, while the line of cadets trembled with suppressed laughter which, an instant later, burst all bounds and shook the ground with a mighty roar. Even the cadet officers, who are supposed to be gravity and dignity personified during the early morning ceremony, could not restrain themselves, and their laughter rang out even more heartily than that of the boys in the line.

As chance would have it, Cadet Captain Arnim, himself, was in charge of the ceremonies on this

particular morning, and unable to crowd down the desire to have a little fun at Mumford's expense, he walked toward the plebe leader as he arose dripping from the water.

"Sir!" he cried. "What do you mean by such conduct?"

"I — I — why, that is — you see —" stammered Darcy, startled by the tone of reprimand in Arnim's voice.

"What do you mean, sir? Answer me!"

"I — I — why, I was just coming down to 'fall in,' sir," said Darcy.

"You did 'fall in,' but you fell in the wrong place."

At this the cadets again burst into a roar of laughter.

"Next time, fall in line, sir — not in water!" was Arnim's parting shot.

"Yes, sir. I — I — er — yes, sir," said the embarrassed plebe.

"You may join the ranks!"

"Yes, sir."

"Salute me!"

"Yes, sir," and Darcy's hand went tremblingly to his cap.

"Silence!" cried Arnim, turning suddenly toward the laughing cadets.

But as well try to stop a river from flowing! The ludicrous appearance of the plebe leader, to say nothing of the manner of his exit from the barracks to plunge into the pool, had touched their risibilities, and several were half way into hysterics. Others, able to stifle their boisterous laughter, were giggling audibly.

Starting to "fall in," Darcy observed Chot and Tom, who were at the edge of the line not more than twenty feet from the pool of water. Looking up, now, Darcy was confronted by Chot's laughing face. All the humiliation at being laughed at by the other cadets was forgotten in a moment. That Chot Duncan, his mortal enemy, should dare laugh at his predicament, angered him, and with blazing eyes he stepped up to the line and before Chot realized what his intentions were, Darcy had struck him with his open hand across the cheek.

Chot, in an attempt to dodge the blow, staggered back into the arms of Tom, but recovering quickly, started for Darcy.

Quick as a flash Cadet Captain Arnim was between them. Then, as Tom and Roy Damon held Chot back, Arnim delivered a scathing denunciation to the leader of the plebes.

"Mr. Mumford," he said, "words fail me when I try to express my contempt for a cadet who would

be guilty of such an action. I had supposed that you were a gentleman, sir! I am sorry I was mistaken!"

"He had no right to laugh at me!" growled Darcy.

"Silence! Don't talk back! Had no right to laugh at you? None of the young gentlemen here had a right then. I laughed at you. You did not offer to strike me. Why, should you single out Mr. Duncan, when every member of your own class, sir, was convulsed with merriment? Stop! Not a word!" Arnim turned quickly to a brother officer: "Cadet Archer!"

"Yes, sir," responded the cadet in question, as his hand flew to his cap in salute.

"Confine Cadet Mumford in the guard-house for twenty-four hours. His release at the end of that time will depend entirely upon his good behavior. See that he has the required number of demerits, and see, also, that the commandant is notified of this action."

With a glance of mingled anger and contempt, Cadet Arnim turned toward the line of cadets and called out the first name on the roll, while Darcy Mumford, realizing for the first time the seriousness of his offense, was led away by Cadet Archer.

CHAPTER XI

THE FIGHT

"I'm sorry, Arnim; I hate to disappoint you, but Mumford has got to fight me at once," said Chot, his lips pressed grimly together.

It was the same night, and the scene the room of Chot and Tom. Tom, however, was not present when Arnim called, having gone in search of Bert Creighton.

"But you gave me your promise, Duncan, to take no action until after the game."

"It was a promise, if you remember, conditioned upon the actions of Mr. Mumford."

"But he has not challenged you."

"That blow this morning was the most emphatic challenge one man could send another."

"I suppose you're right. To be frank with you, I am tempted to leave Mumford out of the game on general principles. I hate to have a cad like that on the team."

"But that wouldn't do, Arnim. I don't wish to appear presumptious, but Mumford is a good player, and during any of our games you will find

me working right with him. At such a time our animosities should be forgotten."

"Those sentiments do you credit, Duncan. As you know, those are my sentiments, too. But there's another thing to take into consideration: Will Mumford be as generous toward you and Pratt and the other members of the team? In other words, will he play his best, or will he by some fluke or other try to spoil our chances for victory?"

"That's something I can't very well decide for you, Arnim. You know best, and if you decide to leave him off the team, why, you have any number of good substitutes who will work hard for old Winton."

"Well, I'll think it over," said the captain, as he arose to leave. "And — er — if you still persist in your notion of challenging Mumford at once — why, I don't mind telling you that I want to see you win!"

Arnim extended his hand as he spoke.

"Thank you," said Chot, "I appreciate that. If circumstances were different, I'd call it off yet to please you, but — well, I think you understand?"

"I understand perfectly, and I don't blame you," said Arnim, as he bowed himself out.

The following morning Darcy Mumford was released from confinement in the guard-house, and meekly took his place in the line of cadets. After sleeping all night on a cot, and being aroused by the sound of reveille, he was a different Darcy from the preceding morning.

To his surprise no one paid the slightest attention to him, except Will Siddons and one or two of his own particular set. Where he expected to receive quiet smiles, he met with cool stares, and he was glad when roll call was over. He was gladder still when sent, with other plebes, to drill under the watchful eye of Cadet Captain Newman.

"Don't mind this," Newman found time to whisper to him during the forenoon. "Just be on your good behavior and they'll forget it in a week."

Darcy nodded, and his heart suddenly warmed toward Dill in such a way that the fourth classman congratulated himself on his wisdom in making friendly overtures to Chot Duncan's sworn enemy. He would have a heart to heart talk with Darcy that night, he decided.

Darcy's surprise was unbounded when at noon he received a challenge from Chot, borne by Wilkes Davis and delivered in a manner as courteous as it was dignified.

"Mr. Duncan requests your presence at Fort Granger to-night at ten o'clock, asks you to bring a couple of friends, and would like an immediate answer," said Wilkes.

"Tell him I'll be there! It will give me a great deal of pleasure to show him who is his master!" hissed Darcy, his temper quickly rising. Why had had he not foreseen this, and sent the challenge first?

"Very well, sir," said Wilkes, and bowing, turned to go. "By the way," he said turning again, "have you any choice for referee?"

"Yes; naturally I want a fair deal. We'll let Mr. Newman act in that capacity."

"Respectfully declined. You know Mr. Duncan is not on speaking terms with Mr. Newman, hence the reason why he should not officiate is obvious."

"Well, who do you want?"

"Any other member of the third or fourth classes."

"Will Roy Damon suit you?"

"Perfectly," said Wilkes.

"Then consider it settled."

Darcy had heard that Roy and Chot were not on friendly terms, and felt that he had scored a point.

The fact that Chot had agreed to him as referee, however, was all that was needed to make Roy very friendly toward the boy who had taught him such a forceful lesson the previous year. Chot's expose of Damon's plot had been very humiliating to Roy, and the thrashing he had received later at Fort Granger had but added fuel to the fire. Since then, however, Chot had frequently shown a desire to be friendly, and gradually the strained relations between the two had simmered down to a point where they treated each other with marked courtesy. Seeing now that Chot had confidence in him, Roy resolved that both men should get a "square deal." If anything, his sympathies were with Chot, for he had been an eye-witness to Mumford's action the previous morning, and knew that the plebe leader was the one to blame.

Besides Damon, only six persons gathered at Fort Granger that night. With Chot were Tom and Fleet; with Mumford, Will Siddons and Fiske Murphy.

There was a full moon, now about two hours high, and the interior of the old battlement was as bright as day.

"There's no need to tell you fellows the rules of the game," said Damon in a low tone, as he tossed

a pair of gloves to Chot and another to Darcy. "I simply want to caution you against making any noise. Do you understand?"

Both boys stripped to shirt and trousers, and a moment later faced each other in the center of the fort. Of the two, Darcy was the larger, being slightly taller and perhaps ten pounds heavier.

"I won't ask you to shake hands," said Roy. "I don't believe you care to. Are you ready?"

"Yes," came from both boys.

Roy looked at his watch. "Then get busy!" he said.

Darcy made a quick spring at Chot, who dodged and retreated slowly. The big plebe was light on his feet and held his fists in a way that showed he knew something of the boxing game. Finding that Chot easily avoided his rushes, he sparred warily for a moment, then led his left for Chot's face. Greatly to his surprise this blow was also evaded with little effort. Darcy realized that Chot was only "feeling him out," and angered, he drove a hard left for Chot's ear, only to find the blow skillfully parried and feel a terrible rap on the jaw in return. His teeth rattled and staggering back, he came near falling.

"Oh, mamma!" cried Fleet, in a low voice, but

quickly subsided when Roy held up his hand in caution.

Darcy soon reached the conclusion that Chot was by long odds the best boxer he had ever encountered, and when the first round ended, and he went to his corner, panting, his expression of confidence was conspicuous by its absence. Chot, on the contrary, with a cool smile on his lips, winked at Tom and Fleet and refused their proffered aid.

Darcy began the second round with another rush, using a swift upper-cut that had never failed him. But now his blows were either blocked or dodged, and each time a sharp return, delivered alternately with Chot's right and left, made him wince. He began to lose his head, and rushed blindly in as if to overwhelm Chot by sheer force. Then Chot began to press the fighting. Blow after blow landed on Darcy's face, neck and body; his guard was beaten down, and finally he threw his arm before his face and retreated, hoping in this manner to ward off the perfect shower of blows Chot Duncan was raining upon him. Then, as he partially recovered, and rushed again, he felt a terrible jolt under the ear and dropped to the ground with a thud.

Dazed, he sat up and looked at his antagonist.

Chot, however, had half-turned toward Tom and Fleet. Then greatly to Darcy's chagrin Chot gave a casual glance at the moon, as if to judge the time, and yawned!

Darcy got up hastily while Damon was counting. His entire being throbbed with indignation. He had felt confident of "making a monkey" of Chot, and had so expressed himself to his chums. But, instead, he had been the one to suffer humiliation.

As the boys went on guard again the end of the second round was announced.

"Good thing for Mumford the round ended then," said Tom.

"Glory, yes; you pretty nearly had him that time, pal," said Fleet.

Chot smiled but refused to sit down. Aside from his breathing, which was a trifle labored, Chot showed no signs of the encounter.

At the beginning of the third round, warned by what had happened that Chot was a dangerous man to fool with, and realizing that his anger had gotten the better of him and made him reckless, Darcy approached Chot cautiously, his guard well up. He succeeded in landing two blows on Chot's body, but both were light. His terrific left swings,

which he had counted upon to settle Chot's chances, were avoided with comparative ease.

"Any time you've had enough, don't hesitate to speak out, Mumford," said Chot, coolly, as he planted a straight left on Darcy's mouth.

"I'll never have enough!" hissed the plebe. "I'll get you yet!"

"Maybe," replied Chot, and feinting with his left for the body, he sent in a right upper-cut that lifted Darcy off the ground — then stretched him full length on the sod.

Second knockdown for Chot!

Darcy took the count but was on his feet as the last number came from Damon's lips. He was slightly dizzy, but with a toss of the head succeeded in shaking off the feeling.

Again he tried his rushing tactics, striking out blindly.

"Why don't you stand still?" he cried, in a rage, as Chot retreated before his onslaughts. He was angered beyond measure because Chot parried or dodged every blow he struck.

"Why do you keep backing away, Duncan?" he continued. "You're afraid! Stand up like a man!"

"You're whipped, Mumford. Why don't you

admit it? Will you force me to knock you out?"

"I'm not whipped! You can't knock me out!" cried the other.

"Why, your face is all puffed up, and it will be worse in the morning, while there isn't a mark on me. If I did what I've been tempted to do since your contemptible action yesterday morning, I'd leave you senseless."

"Why don't you? Why don't you? Oh, I'll get you yet!" cried the plebe leader, savagely.

"Well, I've warned you," said Chot.

"No dirty yearling can ever lick me!" cried Darcy.

"I'll make you sorry you said that," flashed Chot.

Barely had he spoken before he leaped forward, beating down Mumford's guard, and landing a perfect shower of blows on the plebe's neck and face. Darcy parried one or two of the blows, then dodged the others, trying to counter. But his resistance was feeble. In a moment Chot got the opening he wanted. Darcy's face was exposed, and putting all his strength into a right hand swing, Chot sent his foe crashing to the earth.

"I'm sorry you had to do that, Duncan," said Damon, a feeling of pity surging over him.

"I'm sorry, too," Chot responded, "but you heard me warn him; also his reply."

"Yes; I don't blame you. He had his chance."

"If it makes a better man of him, I'm glad I did it," and picking up his jacket, Chot turned toward Tom and Fleet.

"I knew you'd do it," said Tom, seizing his hand.

"My, but that last blow was a corker," said Fleet.

There was no use counting, and Damon realized it, but that there should be no chance for dispute later, he went through the form. Darcy was down and out. His seconds sprang forward and tried to revive him, but it was some minutes before he opened his eyes and gazed dazedly about him.

"Is he all right?" asked Chot, approaching Siddons and Murphy.

"I think so," said Siddons, "but I'm sorry you hit him that last blow, Duncan."

"I had to do it," said Chot. "He was mad enough to have killed me if he had gotten the upper hand. He had his chance and refused to take it. If there's anything I can do, let me know."

Then, with Tom, Fleet, and Roy, Chot turned on his heel and left the fort.

CHAPTER XII

THE ROLLER POLO MATCH

"WHAT's happened to Mumford?"

"Don't ask me; I don't know, but it's marvelous!"

"Yes; he's certainly a different sort of a fellow."

These, and similar remarks were passed from mouth to mouth when the plebe leader made his appearance on the parade ground and at classes after two days spent in the seclusion of his room. There were several abrasions visible on Darcy's face and neck, but aside from these, and an unnatural look about the eyes, his condition was apparently normal.

Instead of flying into a rage over Chot's victory in the fort, Darcy, to the surprise of the cadets, exhibited a better side of his nature, and did not refer to the battle, or to Chot in any way. So far as could be judged from surface indications, the matter, to him, was a closed affair.

"Don't tell me Mumford's taking that defeat so meekly," said Tom, when he and Chot were dis-

cussing the matter in their room one evening. "I understand that several of the boys saw Dill Newman go to his room last night, and when those two get together, you can wager there's mischief brewing."

"Maybe you're right," said Chot. "At any rate, we'll try and keep in trim for them."

Every evening Chot met Wilkes Davis in Walnut Grove and went through an hour's strenuous work with the foils, until Wilkes now declared him to be a fencer after his own heart.

"Of course, it will take more practice to make you perfect," said the lanky lad, "but the talent was there, all right. It only needed developing."

But no signs came from Mumford that he had even thought of such a thing as fencing. Having never seen Chot use the foils in the gym the plebe had reached the conclusion that Chot, at best, was but a mediocre swordsman, and he assured himself that when the time came he would "show him up" in quick style.

On the day Darcy made his reappearance before the cadets, Chot, as leader of the yearlings, received from the plebe a challenge to a roller polo match in the gym. The time suggested was the following afternoon. The note, written by Darcy

himself, was couched in gentlemanly terms, but conveyed the impression that the plebes expected to literally sweep their rivals off their feet.

The floor was cleared in the gym, the athletic apparatus hoisted up out of the way, and when the time came for the game, practically every cadet in the school was on hand to witness the contest.

Chot and Tom had played roller polo at various times and were both expert at the game. Since the opening of the new year at Winton, Chot, believing he would receive a challenge from the third class for a match, formed two teams, each playing against the other with a constant shifting of players. He and Tom had instructed the other boys in the game, showing each his weak points and trying to strengthen them by constant practice. In this way the boys had learned how to block, drive, dodge, pass and a score of other things which every roller polo player should know.

Chot had at last decided upon a representative yearling team as follows:

Duncan, captain and center-rush; Creighton, right-end; Wright, left-end; Pratt, half-back, and Meelick, goal-tender.

In searching for a goal-tender Chot remembered Pod's fine work in the ice hockey contests the

previous winter, and his faith in the little fellow's ability was more than justified, for the second team had been unable to get the ball through him at any stage of their games.

Darcy Mumford chose his plebe team as follows: Mumford, captain and center-rush; Siddons, right-end; De Lange, left-end; Murphy half-back, and Williams, goal-tender.

By mutual consent Cadet Captain Arnim was chosen referee. Arnim had been a former captain of the Winton roller polo team, and was thoroughly familiar with every point of the game.

After a short preliminary conference regarding the rules, the teams lined up, and each captain announced, "Ready!" Mumford made one false start, and was warned back by the referee. Then the whistle sounded shrilly through the gym, and darting quickly out from the yearling line, Chot caught the ball on the end of his stick, and sent it hurtling against the wall but a few feet to one side of the plebe goal.

The shot had no sooner been made than Truem Wright skated swiftly down the floor to bother Murphy, who attempted to secure the ball for a drive. Foot by foot they contested, finally plugging the sphere into a corner from which place

Murphy dug it out and passed it to another plebe, who skipped it down the floor toward the yearling goal.

Tom shot forward to bother the man with the ball, but the plebe passed it to Mumford, who suddenly drove it with the full force of his stick toward the goal. Pod tried to stop it, barely touched it, and it shot past him like a bullet.

"Ping!" went the bell, and Darcy Mumford had scored the first goal of the game. The plebes sent up a shout of approval, as Arnim marked the time and announced it as four and three-quarter minutes.

The referee then took the ball to the center again, while the teams changed ends.

"Get that doleful look off your face, Podsy," said Chot, smiling. "Accidents will happen."

"But I should have stopped it, Chot," said the little fellow, and the look on his face showed he felt it keenly.

"But you didn't. No use crying over spilled milk. Up and at 'em again!"

The teams lined up and at the sound of the whistle went into the fray again.

Both Chot and Darcy shot out toward the ball, but again Chot was the quicker, and swinging a

fraction ahead of his rival, he sent the sphere straight for the goal of the plebes. Williams, the goal-tender, blocked it with his feet and it shot to the side of the rink with three men in pursuit. There was a sharp scrimmage, then Chot emerged from the group with the ball, which he again drove for goal. De Lange was in the way, however, and with a clever stop, he sent it careening away to Siddons, who drove it for the yearling goal.

Pod stopped it. It bounded out on to the floor. Tom tried to take it, but Murphy got it and again it went spinning toward the yearling goal. Pod blocked it with his shins. Tom then got it and drove it past Murphy, but Mumford stopped it and passed it to Siddons, as Chot and Bert closed in on him.

Siddons, forced by Creighton to pass the ball along, tried to send it to Murphy. Tom was in the way, however, and reaching out he caught the ball almost off the end of Murphy's club. Tom then skated swiftly around the yearling goal, taking the ball with him, while three of the plebes sprang forward to intercept him. But before they could reach him, he had sent it like a shot to Chot, who, seeing a magnificent opening, drove it for the plebe goal.

Williams crouched to meet the drive, stopped it and sent the ball back across the floor. Again Chot got it, again he drove for goal. Again Williams stopped it. For the third time Chot got the ball while the other players were skating up, and again he drove for goal. But even the third trial failed to get it past the cautious Williams.

"Hard luck, old man!" cried someone in the crowd.

Mumford got the ball, then, and like a flash went down the floor with it toward the yearling goal, the other players in pursuit. Suddenly he drove and again Pod used his shins to good advantage. The ball bounded out on the floor and there came a terrific mix-up in front of the yearling goal, during which the plebes made three drives for the bell, only to have each one successfully blocked by Pod.

Tom finally got the ball and drove it the length of the rink for the plebe goal, but the drive went wild. Chot and Darcy, neck and neck, went down the floor after the ball. Then the plebe leader, believing his superior weight would tell if he caught Chot unawares, skated heavily against the yearling captain to block him off. He was surprised to be sent whirling around by a shove from Chot's

shoulder, and recovered just in time to keep from falling.

"Wow! That surely hurt!" cried Fleet. "That's what I call beating him at his own game!" and he slapped Randy Denton on the back with such force as to make him wince.

"Don't get fresh!" advised Randy. "My back's only flesh and blood, you know — not cast iron!"

"Forget it, bo!" was all the satisfaction he got from the fleshy lad, who had again turned his attention to the game.

Darcy was mad now. Feeling from the first a supreme confidence in the ability of his men to defeat the yearlings, he had played with a cool smile which belied the feeling of rancor he felt in his heart toward Chot. But now his face took on a more ferocious look. He lunged for the ball again, and bumped into Chot with considerable force, only to again find the yearling leader braced for the shock. Again it was the plebe who suffered as a result of the collision.

"I'll get you yet!" Darcy hissed.

Chot laughed pleasantly.

"That's what you said before we met at the fort the other night. Do you catch the moral?" was his reply delivered in a low tone, but perfectly

audible to the plebe to whom alone it was addressed.

Seeing he was not in a position to drive for goal, Chot sent the ball to Creighton, who tried to pass it to Truem, only to have Murphy dash in and take it away. The ball went like a flash toward the yearling goal. It was not an accurate drive, however, and Pod left the goal to skate out and catch it on the end of his stick, while Tom, dashing up, covered Pod's position. Dodging this way and that, Pod carried the ball down the floor toward the plebe goal. Just in the nick of time Williams got in the way, as Pod made a beautiful drive.

The plebes got possession of the ball again, and Pod, skating back to his post, relieved Tom, as the rival team fought their way back toward the yearling end. Every inch was hotly contested, but they forced the ball gradually along.

Chot finally got it by a clean dash, and passed it to Truem, who drove for the plebe goal. Again Williams got in the way. Then, as the ball was returned to the floor, and a mix-up seemed imminent, the referee's whistle announced the end of the first quarter.

The score stood, Plebes, 1, Yearlings, 0.

Chot talked encouragingly to his men during the brief intermission, and when the teams lined up

again the yearlings were determined to have a goal before the quarter was many minutes old.

Arnim's whistle soon sent them in to battle, and for three minutes the work was fast and furious, the ball being kept in constant motion. Twice was the plebe goal in danger, but it seemed impossible to get the ball past Williams. Then, so suddenly as to daze the yearling rooters, Mumford drove the ball past Pod for another goal.

Arnim announced the time as six minutes, two seconds.

Chot and his men fought like demons the rest of the quarter, but at the end the score stood the same, Plebes, 2, Yearlings, 0.

Again, after a brief rest, the teams went into the fray. Darcy and his men now wore looks of disdain that would have nettled any but the cool heads that composed the yearling team. As for Chot, he only smiled and encouraged his men.

"We'll get 'em — we'll get 'em!" he kept dinning into their ears.

Chot secured the ball and suddenly sent it to Truem, flashing him a signal that made him gasp. There could be no mistake, however. Chot must know what he was doing Truem thought, so he prepared to obey his instructions. Then the watch-

ers on the line saw a daring play. Chot skated leisurely toward the plebe goal, as several of the plebe players skated toward Truem to take the ball away. Williams eyed Chot narrowly. Then Truem shot the sphere like a flash to Chot, who caught it and darted straight at Williams. The goal-tender was dazed at the suddenness of the play, and hardly moved as Chot calmly pushed the ball between his feet, thrust it through the netting, and rang the bell!

Then it was the yearlings' turn to cheer, and they fairly raised the roof.

"What's the matter with you, to let him do a thing like that?" demanded Darcy, glaring fiercely at Williams.

"I did the best I could. If you don't like it, tend goal yourself," was the response, and Darcy, with a few muttered words, skated out onto the floor again.

The plebe leader attempted to get revenge for Chot's daring play, and did push the sphere into close proximity to the yearling goal, but Bert Creighton got it and drove it the full length of the floor, and though it missed the goal, it broke up the plebe formation.

The play became fast and furious again. Mur-

phy drove savagely for the yearling goal. Pod stopped the ball, sent it to Tom, who passed it to Truem, who drove it straight between Williams' legs, ringing the plebe bell for a second time.

With the score tied there was another uproar from the yearlings, led by Fleet and Wilkes.

After three more minutes of play the gong announced the end of another quarter.

"We've got 'em going, fellows," said Chot, as he and his men gathered in one corner of the gym for a rest and chat.

A moment later the gong clanged and the teams lined up for the last time.

Chot, dashing forward when the signal to play was given, took the ball off Mumford's stick, and with a single straight drive, sent it whizzing through the plebe goal, ringing the bell!

There was a gasp of amazement at the rapidity of the play, then the cheering broke loose again.

Arnim smiled as he marked the time, and when he announced it there was another shout. What he said was:

"Fifth goal, Duncan. Time, one second."

The game was quickly on again. The plebes needed one goal to tie, two to win, and Mumford and his men kept desperately at the yearlings.

Then in front of the yearling goal occurred an incident which showed that Darcy Mumford still hated Chot as intensely as ever.

Chot suddenly slipped while he had the ball, and Darcy, skating forward, apparently to take the sphere out of Chot's reach, instead of aiming at it, sent a blow crashing straight toward Chot's head. If it had reached its mark, Chot's days on earth might have ended then and there. But Truem Wright, who was also after the ball, saw the move, and with a quick swing of his stick blocked the blow and sent the plebe leader reeling off to one side, while Creighton darted in and seized the ball.

"You dog!" hissed Truem, glaring at Darcy. But the plebe leader turned away and skated off in pursuit of the ball.

"Did you see what he tried to do?" asked Truem, as he helped Chot to his feet.

"Yes," was Chot's reply, "and I won't forget it. Thanks old man, for your timely assistance."

"Oh, that's all right," said Truem. But he flushed with pleasure. He had been able to do Chot a service in return for the many Chot had done him, and he was glad.

The battle now raged in the middle of the floor,

neither side making any noticeable gains. Desperately the plebes tried to break the almost perfect formation of the yearling lines. But the yearlings, on the defensive, giving ground, but never allowing the ball to approach the goal, were resolved that their rivals should not score again. Closer and closer to the yearling goal went the players, however, and Pod Meelick crouched in front of his position, eyeing intently every move. Finally Mumford got the ball and it looked like a plebe score as he drove for goal. But Pod caught the sphere, sent it caroming over to Chot, who, catching it on the end of his stick, and observing an opening in the plebe ranks, drove it straight and true for the plebe goal. Williams, caught slightly off his guard, tried to stop it, but it escaped him somehow, went through the netting and the bell rang.

"Gee! What a relief," cried Fleet, as he mopped the perspiration from his brow and leaned heavily on Randy's shoulder.

Thirty seconds later, just as the ball was into play again, the referee's whistle announced the end of the game. Score Yearlings, 4; Plebes, 2.

Chot Duncan had won the game for his team by two of the prettiest drives ever seen at Winton.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PLOTTERS

When Mumford and his cronies gathered in the room of Darcy and Will Siddons that evening, they were a discomfited lot, and, once inside, and the door closed, took no pains to conceal the fact.

"We put up a stiff game," said Morton De Lange, "but Chot Duncan's confounded luck was with him — as it always is."

"Sure, and it may be luck as you say, Mort, but 'tis me own belief thot Duncan and his men played the game a little better than we did," remarked Fiske Murphy, dryly.

Will Siddons turned quickly.

"Oh, come now, Murphy," he said, "what do you want to turn against your friends for?"

"Sure and I'm not turnin' against me friends — I'm only tellin' the truth. I can't help it if the truth hurts you."

"But, man, we out-played 'em at every stage of the game."

"During the first part — maybe. Later — no."

"That's right," Carter Williams chimed in, "we

did let down a little toward the last, fellows. Maybe that was what caused our defeat."

Darcy, who had been listening to the chatter of his chums with an air of languid interest, now arose from his seat near the window, where he had been breaking one of the rules of the school by smoking a cigarette, and faced Carter.

"Williams, if anyone let down toward the last, it was you," he said. "I know I played my level best from beginning to end, and I had given you credit for doing the same."

"I played to the best of my ability," returned Carter, sullenly.

"Well, be all thot as it may," said Fiske, "they got us, didn't they? Sure! So let's choose a more agreeable subject."

"Why don't you want to talk about the game?" Darcy demanded.

"Because I'm not the fellow to worry over a defeat — thot's why. They bate us fair and square, and as far as I'm concerned I've no regrets — I did my darndest. But I'm willin' to take 'em on again any toime you say the word."

"Not much chance for that again this year," said Darcy, with a careless shrug. "Unless we can find some branch of sport they're weak on." He

stopped suddenly and turned to face his friends. "I tell you, boys, it galls me to have this fellow, Duncan, and his crowd get the best of us in everything we attempt. Why, they tell me that last year, when he was leader of the plebes, the yearlings didn't have a look-in on anything. Now, why can't *we* do that?"

He looked from one to the other as if expecting a solution of the problem, but all were silent. Each boy knew in his heart why Chot Duncan had been able to do well where Darcy had failed — knew that it was the yearling leader's good principles, and his square way of doing things, coupled with the fact that he was a trained athlete, that made him successful in all he undertook.

"Well, why don't someone answer?" Darcy demanded, after a moment. "Is this Chot Duncan such a phenomenon in all branches of athletics that we can't find somewhere in his make-up a vulnerable spot? Or is it that you fellows are not inclined to battle further for the interests of the plebes?" he added, with a sneer.

"Sure there's no use talkin' thot way, Darcy," said Fiske. "We've stood by you from the first drop o' the hat."

"And I think we're ready to battle along most

any lines," said Will Siddons, "but the plain fact of the matter is that Duncan and those eight fellows he has gathered around him are a hard bunch to beat at anything. I'm sorry to say it, yet we had best look the facts straight in the face."

"Well, I don't agree with you," said Darcy. "I believe, with De Lange, that it has been merely a matter of luck, and that if we keep trying we'll get them yet."

"Well, just show me how, and I'm with you," said Fred Whittington.

"And I," said Joe Reagan.

"The great trouble now," said Fiske, "is thot we can't depend enough on the other plebes to help us out. It's a case of go it alone in anything we undertake with the idea of humiliating Duncan and his crowd."

"The other fellows have held somewhat aloof from us of late," said Carter Williams. "I wonder why?"

There was no immediate answer, but several of the boys exchanged glances.

"Well, if you fellows know, let me in," persisted Carter, looking from one to the other.

"Never mind why!" growled Darcy.

"Oh, Williams might as well know," said Fiske.

"I'm surprised that he hasn't already suspected." He turned to Carter. "It's because Darcy struck Duncan in the face before roll call the other morning. Even the fellows in our own ranks didn't like it, and they haven't hesitated to show it in their treatment of us since."

"But why should we *all* suffer for something Darcy has done?" Whittington wanted to know.

"Sure, ask me an easy one," returned the Irish lad. "It's because we're seen in his company all the toime, I suppose."

"Well, it was an unfortunate incident," admitted Siddons. "Darcy lost a lot of sympathy by his little indiscretion."

"Well, let's not go over that again," growled the plebe leader. "Haven't I had a night in the guardhouse, and a knockout by Duncan, without you fellows plastering on more punishment? Besides, I've told you secretly that I was sorry it happened. I was angry — I forgot myself. But if you think I'm going to Duncan and tell him so, you're badly mistaken."

"No need to go to him now," said De Lange. "I guess he's had all the satisfaction he needs for some time."

Darcy gritted his teeth and remained silent.

"I've got to cut loose from this crowd, so far as getting square with Duncan is concerned," he told himself. "They won't go far enough for me," and his hands clenched, instinctively. "I'm going to humiliate that fellow if I'm expelled from Winton the next minute — and that's sure!"

Darcy brought himself out of his reverie to hear what De Lange was saying.

"If this is to be a council of war, fellows," said Morton, "in which we are to decide how to get the best of that yearling bunch, let's not have war among ourselves. What's done is done, and Darcy will gradually win the others back to the fold."

"What have you to suggest, Mort?" asked Siddons.

"Well, I suppose you realize that winter is nearly here. Can't we dig up some game on the ice with which Duncan and his crowd are not familiar?"

"Forget it!" advised Fiske. "I don't want to discourage you, but have you heard the record the plebes made on the ice last season?"

"No. What was it?"

"Well, I wasn't here, of course, but I heard Damon and some of the other third classmen talkin' about it the other day. Duncan, Pratt and Meelick

carried off the honors in the skatin' tournament, winnin' the 100-yard dash, the mile run, and the two-mile run respectively, and they were competing not only with the best men Jackson College could put forward, but the best amateur skaters from Newburgh, Poughkeepsie, Fishkill and other river towns. That doesn't look much like we could defeat them on the ice, does it? Well, there's more to this little tale o' mine. In the ice-hockey game with Jackson, the Winton team, chosen after a try-out of every available man in the school, contained four plebes — Duncan, Pratt, Creighton and Meelick. Then to wind up his career of triumph on the ice, Duncan beat Truem Wright in an ice-boat race, after Wright had tried to foul him and put him out of the runnin', and — there you are!"

Darcy shrugged his shoulders.

"What will you do?" De Lange asked him.

"Well, I've been thinking some lately of challenging him to a fencing match, as I mentioned once before. You know I'm admitted to be the best amateur fencer in New York," he added, proudly.

"But maybe Duncan can fence some too," said Williams.

"No; I understand that he's a perfect novice

with the foils. I've looked into the matter pretty thoroughly, and had all but decided to challenge him to a match when this roller polo business came up."

"Well, if you challenge him, wait until after the game with Columbia," said Whittington.

"Oh, I'm in no hurry," Darcy announced with cool nonchalance. "There's plenty of time. And another thing, boys — I intend to enter the Marathon race I understand the third class is arranging for December. I don't know whether Duncan will be in it or not, or what sort of a runner he is, but he'll have to go some to keep the honors away from the plebes in that event, I can promise you."

Darcy might have wandered on in that strain all night, for he loved to talk of his own achievements, but there came a sudden knock at the door, and in response to his invitation to enter, Dill Newman walked calmly into the room.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Mumford," he said as he saw the others. "I thought you were alone." The tone plainly indicated that Dill expected Darcy to get rid of his friends.

"No matter, Newman — sit down. Is it something important?"

"Well, yes — it's about that — er — that bus-

iness proposition we're going into next summer — er — the — the one I spoke to you about in front of the chapel that day. I'd like a little of your time if you can spare it."

"Oh, certainly — certainly. Sit down, Newman, sit down."

Newman was plainly impatient, and the other boys noticed it. De Lange was the first to rise.

"Well, guess I'll be going, anyway, Darcy," he announced.

"Wait for me," said Whittington. "I want to see you about something."

With various remarks the others arose. Then there were cries of, "See you later, old man!" etc., and the plebes filed out into the corridor, and their footsteps could be heard an instant later receding down the hall.

Newman tip-toed hastily to the door and slipped the catch.

"What's that for?" demanded Darcy.

"That's to keep some of your intimate friends from disturbing us," was the fourth classman's reply. "And now to business." He seated himself on Siddons' trunk and pulling a cigarette case from his pocket, tendered it to Darcy, who signified that he would not smoke. Newman "lit up," however,

then turned to the plebe leader with a smile: "Well, I see Duncan got your scalp again."

"You mean the roller polo game?"

"Yes."

"Accidents will happen," said Darcy, coolly.

"I should think you'd hate to have him get the best of you in everything," said Newman, and there was a slight taunt in his tone.

It was all that was needed to arouse Darcy. His cool manner suddenly left him, and rising to his feet, his eyes narrowing to little slits, he confronted the fourth classman.

"There's a time coming when he won't triumph!" he cried. "I've made up my mind to that. No one in this school knows of the rage, the humiliation, I feel every time I see Duncan. It's like flaunting a red rag in the face of a bull. I don't care whether it's at classes, on the parade ground, or in the gym, that same feeling of hatred takes possession of me. I don't dare to tell that bunch which just left here. They're not friendly to him, and they're willing to beat him at some legitimate sport, but they'll go no farther, and I've got to have someone I can depend on, for, between you and me, Newman, I've made up my mind to give Chot Duncan something to remember me by!"

"Good! Good! I like the way you said that, and it's about this very thing I came to see you. I've a great plan, my boy, and if we can put it through, Chot Duncan will not only fail to pitch on the Winton nine next spring, but his career as an athlete will be ruined forever!"

"What do you mean?" cried Darcy, startled by the ferocious gleam in the other's eyes.

"Just this. You're an expert fencer?"

"Well, yes, I know something about the foils."

"Yes, I guess you do. This is no time to be modest. I've heard of your work along that line — in fact, a friend of mine in New York wrote me that you were about the best that was going. Now, listen! Duncan is a mere novice with the foils — in fact, he's never been known to use them since he came to Winton. I've made inquiries and I know."

"And *I've* made inquiries and *I* know," said Darcy.

"Good! The minute he receives a challenge from you, he'll get cold feet, realizing that you have every advantage. But he'll meet you. Whatever else may be said of him, he's got nerve. He'll accept your challenge, hoping to get off as easy as possible. You have your own foils, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Darcy, waving his hand toward where a pair of delicate weapons were crossed over the door. "The very best in the business, too."

"With a detachable button?"

"Why, yes."

Darcy began to wonder what Newman was getting at.

"Then the rest is easy. Sometime during the match the button becomes detached from your weapon — purely by accident, of course," and Newman laughed in a way that sent the cold chills up Darcy's back.

"You — you mean —?" he gasped.

"Just this. The button comes off. You, being interested in the battle, do not notice it. Then, before you realize it, you have run Duncan through the right shoulder — or, better still, through the muscles of his right arm. If you'll do that, my boy, you'll ruin his chances forever. I guess it won't take much of a teacher to show you who'll be champion of the school then, eh?" and he slapped the plebe leader heartily on the back.

"Oh, but I can't do that, Newman," cried Darcy, appalled by the mere thought of what the other suggested.

"Yes, you can. Why, it won't take much nerve."

"But — but what if they accuse me of injuring him purposely?"

"They won't. The accident must happen so quickly after the button comes off that there will be no time to discover its absence. Once you've run him through, you can apologize if necessary, even help to bind up the wound, knowing in your heart that you've fixed him for good and all."

Darcy stood silent, staring intently at the floor. Somehow, this proposition did not set well on his mind. This was just a little farther than he had intended going.

"Come — your answer," Newman persisted. "I've got to get away from here."

"I — I — I'll think it over."

"Come, man, don't crawfish now! We've been trying for a month to think of a scheme to fix this fresh guy, and now we've got one. Let's put it through!"

For a moment longer Darcy hesitated, then his hatred for Chot surged uppermost again, and extending his hand to Dill, he cried:

"All right, Newman — all right; I'll do it!"

CHAPTER XIV

WINTON TACKLES COLUMBIA

Columbia:	*Positions:*	*Winton:*
James	Right End	Murphy
Lillard	Right Tackle	Stedman
Stevedore	Right Guard	Mumford
Dayton	Center	Harney
Willis	Left Guard	Wright
Dangerfield	Left Tackle	Creighton
Love	Left End	Ardsley
Holly	Quarter-back	Klimt
Davenon	Right half-back	Pratt
Farber	Left half-back	Duncan
Horn	Full-back	Arnim

THE day of the great game arrived at last, and the above was the line-up of the rival teams.

The members of the Winton eleven found themselves alighting from an early forenoon train in the great American metropolis. At the depot they were met by a delegation of Columbia students and escorted to a prominent hotel where quarters for them had been engaged.

For this particular day all New York had gone football crazy. It was the first big game of the season at the Polo Grounds, and while the interest

was not as great as in the annual contests between those giants, Yale, Harvard and Princeton, the admirers of Columbia, which was a New York institution, were many, and turned out en masse to cheer their favorites to victory. Columbia had a long string of victories to her credit, and no defeats, and the opinion was that Winton would be beaten by an overwhelming score. On the result of to-day's contest hung a game with Princeton, which Columbia had long sought, hence the New Yorkers were determined to take no chances with the cadets, but to go in to win from the outset.

At noon people began flocking in great numbers toward the Polo Grounds. The work of the ticket takers soon grew strenuous as the spectators began swarming through the gates. What at first was but a tiny rivulet of people, soon grew into a stream of mammoth proportions. The empty seats began to fill, and as the early afternoon came on, the grandstand and bleachers became a waving field of color. Girls wearing sweaters, to which were pinned Columbia ribbons, boys with horns and canes, the latter fastened to pennants of the New York college, predominated in the vast throng, and everywhere there was a hum of excitement. By two o'clock it seemed that every seat was filled, but

still from every direction people came pouring in.

In the center of the grandstand a band of some fifty Winton cadets in uniform, with Winton colors on their jackets and waving from the sticks they carried in their hands, made the welkin ring with horns and bells which had been brought to New York for this especial purpose. Finally, as the hour of the game approached, the Winton boys sent their song echoing over the field:

"Here's to good old Winton, drink her down!
Drink her down!
Oh, here's to good old Winton, drink her down!
As the autumn winds do blow
There's some things we're here to show
We are warm ones, you shall know —
Drink her down!

Then from the other side of the field came Columbia's answering song, which was no sooner finished than the two teams dashed out of the clubhouse on to the field. Columbia cheers and Winton cheers were mingled, then, as the adherents of each college shouted lustily.

Out on the field, marked with clean white lines, which were soon to be despoiled, and in some places almost obliterated, the members of the rival elevens paused.

After a moment the preliminary practice began. This over, the captains, Holly for Columbia, and Arnim for Winton, walked aside with the referee. Then a coin spun in the air, and the toss fell to Winton, greatly to the delight of the cadets. Arnim gave Columbia the ball and took advantage of the wind. The battle lines were quickly formed in the center of the field, and the substitutes of each team moved uneasily along the ropes, eager to see the fray, and each hoping for a chance to do and dare for the honor of his school.

There was a sudden hush. Horn, the Columbia full-back, stepped off from the ball and sized it up. Then he balanced himself carefully while the players on both sides waited, muscles tense, for the beginning of the play. With a rapid movement Horn swung his foot against the ball, and away it sailed far over into Winton territory.

There was a rumbling rush of feet. Under the ball, poised for a catch, stood Truem Wright. He caught it fairly, but had barely done so when he felt himself slammed to the ground with several hundred pounds of Columbia flesh and blood on top of him.

The men untangled and stood glaring at each other. One of Winton's first plays was to try to

take the ball through Columbia's left wing, but the gain was slight, for the Columbia men closed about Creighton and swamped him, and from this moment it became plain that Winton was up against a hard proposition.

Arnim decided to try a kick from close behind the line, but his toe had hardly touched the pigskin before the enemy were upon him. Dayton succeeded in blocking the ball and a moment later it was down on Columbia's fifty-yard line. The gain had been slight, yet Winton was undaunted. Again and again Arnim tried to kick from behind the line, sure that he would eventually be successful in making a big gain for his team, and finally the ball sailed off through the atmosphere and came to earth on Columbia's twenty-five yard line. Then Columbia got possession of the ball and lined up for her first desperate assault on the Winton line.

First a Columbia man was sent against the Winton right wing, which had been sized up by the New Yorkers as being the weakest spot on the team. But Darcy Mumford was there, and distinguished himself by bringing the man to the ground without a foot of gain.

A moment later a Columbia man went against the Winton left and here the play was more suc-

cessful, and the player, aided by splendid interference, cut his way through and took the ball up the field for fifteen yards, before Tom Pratt tackled him and brought him to earth with a crash.

Columbia next tried a round-the-end play. This was followed by another attack on the Winton left end, but the needed five yards were not obtained on the second down. Then, when Winton thought the enemy was going to send the ball around the end again, Columbia, by a surprising maneuver, which the Winton boys were never able to fathom, suddenly hurled itself in one compact mass against the Winton center.

The surprise was complete. The Winton line wavered, then split in twain. The man with the ball went through, the interferers protecting him splendidly. Down the field he sped toward the Winton goal, while behind him thundered the defenders of the red and orange. It looked like a great sensational run for a touchdown, and the Winton cadets in the grandstand held their breath, while from Columbia's rooters went up a mighty roar.

Arnim was as white as chalk — not because he feared for the Columbia score, but because he was afraid that a rush through the Winton line so early

in the conflict might be demoralizing to his men.

Charging after the Columbia runner, now, from opposite ends, were Chot Duncan and Tom Pratt. Then, suddenly the onlookers saw Tom blocked off by a Columbia interferer. Almost at the same instant the interferer who had dashed at Chot like a charging bull, was seen to shoot out, arms extended. The Winton players felt their hearts sink as Chot apparently ran right into his enemy's grasp. Then they saw the young Winton half-back shoot into the air in one long leap, while the interferer with a last desperate clutch at Chot's legs, which he missed by a hair's breadth, went plunging full length into the dirt. Then Chot, who had gained on the man with the ball, himself shot out on a long tackle. It was accurate and well-made, and the man with the ball went down. There was a pile-up, and when the players untangled it was seen that the Columbia man was injured. Covered with glory and with the cheers of the Columbia students ringing in his ears, he was carried from the field, and Captain Holly motioned another man out from the substitutes to take his place.

The game went on, with Columbia determined to break through Winton's center again, and Winton just as determined not to again be taken off her

guard. Without resort to subterfuge, Columbia drove hard for the Winton center, the very force of the impact carrying the Winton players back until the ball was down on Winton's fifteen-yard line.

"Altogether, boys!" cried Captain Arnim, his words sending cheer to the players' hearts. "Not another inch for them — not another inch!"

And from ten lusty Winton throats came the answering cry:

"Not another inch!"

Hard-faced, desperate, the boys from Winton lined up, as again and again Columbia charged their center — and each time Columbia failed to gain an inch.

Suddenly, then, Columbia tried a pass, but the ball was fumbled. Truem Wright quickly fell on it, and again Winton was able to breathe with a slight sense of security.

"Now, let's have some of the lost ground!" cried Arnim.

He sent a man toward the Columbia right end, but no gain was made. An instant later, however, Ardsley was literally hurled out of a formation play for a gain of four yards. Three downs followed and then, as a last resort, Horn kicked.

The wind helped him, and he got the pigskin away in splendid shape, but Columbia, instead of gaining, lost ground on the return.

But the fight was all in Winton territory. Try as they might, the Winton players could not get the ball past Columbia's center. Three times she came near succeeding, only to fail when success seemed within her grasp.

The half was drawing to a close, and neither side had scored. Those New Yorkers who had predicted an early victory for Columbia were forced to admit that their favorite college had met a foeman worthy of her best.

Responding to the call of Captain Holly, the Columbia men now bucked the Winton line time after time, and to the despair of the Winton cadets, the line of the red and orange seemed to weaken under the continued assaults. Columbia made steady gains until the ball was pushed back to Winton's thirty-yard line, where there was a fearful scrimmage. When it was over, Bert Creighton was carried from the field with a sprained ankle.

"That settles it!" groaned Willis Harney. "One of the most dependable men in the game! Too bad!"

Wilkes Davis was brought out from among the

substitutes to take his place, and the game went on, with Columbia hammering steadily as before. Back, back, slowly but surely, went the Winton line. Finally, the advance was checked momentarily on the twenty-five yard line. Then back again for gains of two, four, three, two and four yards, until the pigskin was down but ten yards from the Winton goal.

"Hold 'em — hold 'em!" cried Arnim, desperately.

But Columbia showed no mercy. She was out to win, no matter what the cost to the opposing team — or to her own, for that matter. Her unbroken string of victories must be increased. It would never do to go down in defeat before the attacks of the Winton cadets.

Winton was making a last stand now, and her men, teeth gritted, hands clinched, received the onslaught of the Columbia players. Into Winton's right end, then the left end, then the center, rammed the fierce New Yorkers. Then to the right end, then the center again for a gain of four yards.

"It's all over but the shouting," groaned Fleet Kenby to Pod Meelick, as the two loyal Winton rooters peered through the wires of the grandstand at the surging mass of men.

"Don't give up the ship," advised the little fellow.

"I don't want to, but there's no use in talking, those New York guys are too heavy for us. Why, they're all men, while the Winton team is composed of boys."

"Never mind," said Pod. "Keep your eye on the *boys!*"

But even as Pod spoke Fleet groaned again.

"It's a shame — I don't want to see this," he cried. "I'm going to turn my face."

For Columbia had made another desperate effort to break through the Winton center. The two lines swayed back and forth. The cadets fought desperately and surged back, then, recovering, pushed the Columbia line back at least three yards, and with a loss of one yard to the New Yorkers, the ball was down.

Before play could be resumed the referee's whistle announced the end of the half, and Winton was saved for the time.

CHAPTER XV

ON EDGE

In the dressing-room set aside for the use of the Winton players there was considerable excitement during the intermission. The men were being hastily rubbed down. Some were sore and dispirited, but for the most part they were ready for the next encounter, which they realized would be the most desperate they had ever had.

"There's nothing to it," said Truem Wright, as he sat panting on a bench after a rub-down, "old Winton's never been up against anything like this before."

"Right for once," said Wilkes Davis, "and the toughest part of this tough proposition is that the toughest part is to come."

"Here!" warned someone, "cut the jokes till after the game."

Wilkes smiled and went on to the water cooler, where he drank sparingly of water barely cool.

"Don't you fellows get it into your heads for a minute that we're not going to beat this crowd — for we are!" This from Captain Arnim. "They

have a little the best of us in weight, but that's no more than we expected when we came down here Look at those Jackson fellows — they averaged ten pounds to a man heavier than we, yet we walloped 'em in good shape. So let's up and at this New York bunch. They'll try the play that was most successful — bucking our center — and we've got to be on the watch for it every minute, and throw forward our best defense. Watch the play and keep them from going through our center!"

"I believe Arnim's right, boys," said Chot, and the others nodded their heads. The captain's tone had carried conviction, so earnest was it. And when, a few minutes later, the teams lined up again, with Winton fighting against the wind, instead of Columbia, Arnim showed the proper spirit. It was his kick-off, and he dashed fiercely at the ball and drove it into the air.

Lillard made the return, and for a few moments there was some sharp volleying. Then Winton's right end was sent to Columbia's center with the ball, but the gain was slight. A forward pass was tried and gained five yards for the cadets, but Winton was held there on "downs" until the ball went to Columbia.

Fulfilling Arnim's prediction, Columbia returned

to the method of play that she had found so successful in the first half — she began to buck the Winton center. But here she found a surprise. The Winton line was like a stone wall, and three downs came one after the other.

Then Lillard punted to Tom, who made a beautiful catch, tucked the ball under his arm, and went past Columbia's end like a shot. He was getting up an enormous speed when two men struck him on Columbia's thirty-five yard line and brought him down with a terrible shock. For a moment the breath seemed to leave Tom's body, but he quickly rallied, and when the Columbia men untangled, and the Winton half-back arose to his feet and went back into the game, he was greeted with a burst of cheers.

Winton was unable to make a further gain, and Arnim finally punted out of bounds. Then a Columbia man went around Winton's left end for a gain of four yards. Columbia's left guard was injured in interfering for the runner and another man was substituted. In the anxiety of Darcy Mumford to stop his fresh opponent in the line he went past him before the ball was put into play, and Winton was punished by having to give Columbia five yards.

"Blockhead!" growled Arnim beneath his breath. But aloud he said: "It's all right, old man — accidents will happen." Then he turned to his other men with shouts of encouragement. But in spite of all he could say or do, prospects seemed brightening up for the New Yorkers again.

Columbia beat Winton back into her territory yard by yard. It seemed to the onlookers that Columbia must win decisively soon. Her men were so much larger than the boys from up the river, that the latter were kept on the defensive two-thirds of the time. At that, Winton was making a stronger defense than she did in the first half, and in that half she had kept Columbia from scoring, so the Winton rooters had not given up hope.

Chot had not found a single opportunity to show what he could do in the second half. But now he was able to stop two successive attacks of the Columbia men, by his individual efforts, and for each he received a word of praise from Arnim. Then the ball came to Winton on a fumble, and Chot was tried on the line. He won seven yards and was wildly cheered by the boys in the grandstand.

Again Columbia held Winton, while the downs came thick and fast. The ball went to the New Yorkers once more.

Horn punted beautifully. Tom took the ball and shot forward as if to go around Columbia's right end in the same way he had made his previous attempt. But as he went by Wilkes Davis he passed the ball, and Wilkes turned and shot toward Columbia's left end. Then the ball quickly left his hands and shot into those of Chot, who went into the center of the Columbia line with Winton interferers all about him. This was done so quickly that Columbia was for the moment bewildered, and again Chot made a gain of about seven yards.

This was encouraging. The Winton men were fighting like tigers now, and the New Yorkers realized that it was they who must wake up. So Columbia made a desperate stand and kept Winton from making a further advance until she was able to secure the ball.

Again Horn resorted to a punt and this time Tom sent it back. A Columbia man had it like a flash and went at Winton's left end, cutting through like a knife. Escaping tackler after tackler, he raced madly down the field, until, on Winton's twenty-five yard line, Tom Pratt pulled him down.

There was a quick line-up and the battle was resumed in Winton's territory. Back toward the center of the gridiron the Winton boys drove their

husky rivals, then back again into Winton territory the New Yorkers forced the red and orange.

"Gee, looks like we might keep Columbia from scoring," cried Fleet. "I feel like breaking into verse."

"Then please take it out in feeling," advised Pod. "If you begin to spout we'll lose sure."

"Thanks, little one — I'll keep still then. Oh, if we can only get an even break from these fellows, it will be a feather in our cap."

"We're going to win, I tell you," was Pod's reply. "Nothing but a victory will satisfy me."

But the time of the game was drawing so near the close that it looked as if it must be a drawn contest.

Columbia had the ball and there was a scrimmage. Out of the midst of it shot Tom Pratt with the ball. No one was ever able to figure out how he got it, but it was enough to the Winton cadets to see him flying down the field with it under his arm. He ran with wonderful speed. But several Columbia men barred his way; in fact, came at him from every direction. He bowled the first man over, dodged the next, and kept on, and had he not been partially exhausted from his part in the scrimmage, none of the others would have laid a finger

on him. As it was, Holly came down on him with a rush, and ten yards from Columbia's goal, the captain of the New Yorkers tackled Tom.

The Winton boy felt the Columbia captain's heavy clutch, but refused to be dragged down. With all the power he could muster, he strove to break away and go on. Still, Holly clung tenaciously to his waist. Looking back Tom saw half a dozen Columbia men charging toward him. It was now or never! With a last supreme effort he broke Holly's hold, and plunging forward, reeled and fell across Columbia's line — and the ball was under him!

It was a touchdown and the Winton cadets shouted until they were hoarse. There was not even time to kick a goal, for as Tom picked himself up, the referee's whistle announced the end of the game.

Winton had beaten the crack Columbia eleven, by the score of 5 to 0!

It was a merry crowd that took the train for Winton that night, and all the way up the inhabitants of villages along the route were startled from their sleep by the tooting of horns, the ringing of bells and the singing of the Winton glee club.

It was Winton's greatest athletic victory.

CHAPTER XVI

TOM IS SURPRISED

"SURE, man, what's the matter with your face?" queried Fiske Murphy, as he stopped the leader of the plebes on the parade ground the day after the return from New York. "Ye look sore."

Darcy turned, but the half-ferocious expression remained on his countenance.

"I am sore," he admitted—"sore all over."

"Is it because ye did such strenuous work in the game yisterday?"

"No; it's because I didn't. I had no chance, as usual, but those other fellows, Duncan and Pratt, distinguished themselves in various ways."

"Maybe they had better opportunities than you?"

"Of course, they had. That's the secret of their good showing. Arnim dislikes me, as you know, and when he called the difficult plays, he left me out as much as possible."

"Where you headin' for — the gym?"

"Yes."

"If ye don't moind, I'll walk along with ye."

As the boys started off a voice hailed them from behind.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," it said, "but would you have the extreme kindness of granting to me one minute's conversation?"

It was Hoki Nagasuki.

"Didn't I tell you to leave me alone in the future?" Darcy demanded, turning quickly.

"Yes, sir, but this is a matter of gravest importance."

"I don't care if it is — I don't want to hear it."

"Very well, sir. It is you who will do suffering if you do not listen," said the little Jap.

"Why don't you want to hear what he has to say?" asked Fiske. "It must be important or he would never have stopped you."

Darcy hesitated, then growled reluctantly:

"Well, go on."

"It is this," said Hoki, his black eyes snapping like coals of fire, "I want to know where you secured possession of that watch and fob," and he pointed at the golden ornament which hung from the watch pocket of Darcy's trousers.

"Well, of all the impudence! What business is it of yours where I got it? Why, I'll —"

"Just one minute, sir. I have very good reason for asking. I have not seen you wear that fob very long, and some time ago my friend, Tom Pratt, lose one just like it, and with watch at the other end."

"Well, I'm not responsible for what he loses. I did not *find* this watch and fob."

"When I say lost, I not mean what you mean —I mean the watch and fob were stolen!"

"Stolen!"

"Yes; from his room."

"Then you mean to insinuate that I took them?"

"No. I know very well that you did not. It please me to be able to so express myself. The theft occur on the day you and I had ruction in the gym. When Tom got to his room after taking considerable exercise for benefit of his health, the watch is gone. He had left it lying on the table when he went out."

"Well, I don't see what I have to do with this."

"Perhaps nothing, yet I am going to ask you to let me see that watch."

"Well, you'll take it out in asking, then!"

"Very well. I shall tell Tom Pratt of my suspicions." Hoki started off.

"Hold on! Don't go telling tales! That bunch

thinks badly enough of me as it is. They're always ready to credit me with any old sort of intentions. But I'm not a thief."

"No," said the Jap, "but you might have purchased watch from burglar without knowing to whom it belonged."

"Why, I —"

"Tell me if you have had the watch long."

"Why, no — that is, I did buy it from a certain party the other day. But the party is above suspicion. Anyway, I don't believe this is Pratt's watch."

"Perhaps you'd better be sure," said Fiske. "It will do no harm to look."

"You're right. If it is a stolen article, I don't want it, and I'll have a reckoning with the man who sold it to me."

He pulled out the watch as he spoke.

"Before you let me see it," said Hoki, "I will tell you what Tom's watch was like. It was a hunting case, the face was dark with gold figures, and in the back was monogram with letter, 'T. P.' Now, will you see?"

Heads together, Darcy and Fiske examined the timepiece.

"He's right about the general style of the watch,"

said Darcy. "Now, look in the back. I've never had it open since I bought it."

With a knife blade Fiske gently pried open the case, and there, staring up from the polished metal, were the letters Hoki had described — the monogram of Tom Pratt!

"Begorra," cried Fiske, lapsing into his richest brogue, "the Jap's called the turn on ye this toime."

"It looks that way," Darcy admitted. "If Tom Pratt has really lost his watch, there is a good chance that this is it, for I bought it of a boy who professed to be in need of some cash. I paid twenty dollars for it. It's worth lots more than that, and I knew I had found a bargain." He turned to Hoki. "Let me keep it until I can see the party I got it from. Don't say a word to Pratt, and just as soon as I learn the truth, I'll return the watch."

"All right, sir — that will give entire satisfaction to me," returned Hoki, gravely, and bowing, he turned on his heel and walked away.

"Who did you buy that watch from, Darcy?" asked Fiske, as the boys continued across the parade ground toward the gym.

"I don't care to say," was the reply —"not until

I've had a talk with the party. Can I trust you not to mention this business to anyone?"

"Sure ye can trust me — ye know thot."

"I don't doubt you, old man — just wanted to hear you say it," and Darcy laughed. All the way to the gym he kept muttering to himself.

"The idea of that dirty little Jap trying to take me to task for this," he kept saying over and over. "How I hate him! I'll run him out of Winton yet — I will — I will!" Then his face lighted up suddenly as a thought struck him, and an instant later he emitted a hoarse chuckle.

"I'll get him, and I'll get him to-day!" he cried, half-aloud.

"What'll you get?" asked Fiske.

"Oh, nothing, my boy — nothing. I was merely mumbling to myself."

When they entered the gym they found that a large crowd of cadets had preceded them. The weather was raw and chilly outdoors. As Fleet Kenby had remarked but a few minutes previous, there was "snow in the air," and the majority of the boys were only too glad to spend their spare time in the steam-heated building.

Tom, with Chot and several other members of the "nine," was performing on the horizontal bars.

He looked up in surprise when he saw Darcy approaching.

"May I speak to you a moment, Pratt?" asked the plebe, in a tone frigidly polite.

"Why, certainly," Tom responded. "Do you want to see me alone?"

"If you please."

Chot and his companions exchanged wondering glances, as the yearling and the plebe walked over by the rowing machines, out of earshot.

"Now, what is it, Mumford?" asked Tom.

"Is this your watch?" questioned the plebe, pulling out the timepiece and passing it over for Tom's inspection.

"Why, yes," said Tom. He could not conceal his astonishment. "But how did you know? Where did you get it?"

"One question at a time, my dear fellow," replied Darcy, with the air of one who is conferring a great favor. "I am going to answer your last question first. While I was coming across the parade ground a few minutes ago, I met a certain plebe. He stopped me with a hard luck tale, and asked if I had any ready money. I replied that I had, and he said he must have twenty dollars at once, and that he had good security. When I asked

him what it was, he produced that watch. I'm not familiar with your property, Pratt, but that fob is a peculiar one, and it happened that I recollected having seen it a number of times. So I took the watch and passed over the twenty. When I got by myself I looked for marks of identification, and found the monogram, 'T. P.' inside the case. Then, meeting several of the boys, I heard one say that your watch had been stolen, and realized that I had been fortunate enough to recover your property."

"I am certainly obliged to you, Mumford. And now, if you will tell me the name of the plebe who sold you the watch, I'll —"

"I hate to do that, Pratt, because it's a fellow I don't like, and it looks too much as if I were seeking personal revenge. I suppose this business will mean expulsion for him."

"Tell me, Mumford, it's my right to know, and leave that part to me!"

"Well, it was that little Jap."

"Not Hoki!" cried Tom.

Darcy nodded.

"I hated to tell you, because I know the Jap is somewhat of a protegé of yours and Duncan's, but in a matter of this kind, I suppose it is best

to be quite frank with you and not to hesitate."

"Of course not. You did right, Mumford," replied Tom. But he was thinking deeply as he said it. Could Hoki be guilty of the theft after all? It was hard to believe, yet Mumford was apparently telling a straight story.

"I'll just drop the matter here," said Darcy, "and leave you to take such action as you see fit."

"That will be best, I think. And now, let me reimburse you for the twenty you expended in my behalf."

"Oh, don't mind about that now," protested the plebe. "When you get it back from the Jap will be time enough. I don't need it right away."

"I prefer to pay it and get it from the Jap later, and in my own way," said Tom, taking out his pocket book.

"As you will."

Darcy accepted the two tens Tom offered him, and with a bow walked away.

Tom went back to his comrades with a heavy heart. Try as he might, he could not rid himself of the feeling of depression that had come with the return of the watch. The boys noticed his mood and commented upon it.

"Gee, you look like he'd handed you a jolt in the solar plexus," said Pod.

"Maybe he has," Tom replied, and to their surprise, he did not smile.

"What's the matter?" asked Chot.

He knew in an instant that something had gone wrong. Tom had never been successful in hiding his real feelings. Chot could assume gaiety whether he felt it or not, but Tom had never been blessed with this happy faculty.

Tom shook his head in response to his chum's query, and Chot knew better than to question him further. It was a matter to be discussed in the privacy of their own room. Tom's actions showed that.

The talk turned to athletics again, and the boys began speculating as to how they were to pass the winter. Of course, the old Hudson would soon be frozen over, and there would be skating, ice-hockey, and ice-yachting — especially the latter, for the Comrades and Truem owned two of the finest yachts on the river.

"By the way," said Wilkes Davis, "do you see that slim plebe over there in the end of the gym?"

The attention of the yearlings immediately be-

came focused on the young man in question. He was a tall, well-built boy, with a air of determination. At the present time he was bossing a gang of carpenters who were erecting a queer looking object in one corner of the big structure.

"That's Dick Kershaw," continued Wilkes, "and he's here from Montana. His father owns a ranch out there — in fact, is one of the biggest cattlemen in the west, and the boy has money to burn."

"But what's he doing now?" asked Fleet.

"I understand that he went to the commandant a couple of weeks ago, and offered to donate a shooting gallery to the school absolutely free of charge, equipped with rifles, targets, ammunition, everything. As you know — the commandant has long wanted a shooting gallery here, but felt that it was rather a luxury than a necessity. So he accepted the offer, and the gallery is to be ready in a few days. Its erection will allow young Mr. Kershaw to indulge his shooting propensities to the limit, and I'm told he's a crack shot."

"And the gallery is being installed under his personal supervision, eh?" asked Chot.

"It looks that way."

"Very good. Mr. Kershaw interests me greatly.

I like to see a boy with independent spirit, a mind of his own, and nerve enough to use it."

"And I," said Randy Denton. "Don't you, Tom?"

"Eh?" said Tom, starting up out of a reverie. "What did you say, Randy? I — I didn't hear you, but I guess it's all right," and head in his hands, he fell to thinking deeply again.

"Well of all the — !"

Randy threw a wondering glance at Chot, who shrugged his shoulders, then shook his head.

"Let him alone," he said.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CHALLENGE

Tom was silent all the way to the barracks, and not until he and Chot were in their room, and the door closed, did he mention the matter of the watch. Then, as briefly as possible, he told Chot everything.

"I just can't believe that Hoki took it," he said, in conclusion.

"Nor I," said Chot. "There's a nigger in the woodpile somewhere, and we've got to run him out."

"You believe this is some game of Mumford's?"

"Yes; I believe he is trying to shield the real thief, and that he has thrown suspicion on the Jap because he hates him. He has made threats several times I understand that he'll run Hoki out of Winton."

"Well, he's apt to go before Hoki," said Tom. "If this is a conspiracy, we owe it to the school, as well as ourselves, to run it down and throttle it."

Chot sat thinking deeply for a moment.

"You say he told you that he heard from some of the boys that your watch was missing?"

"Yes."

"Well, hadn't you stopped to wonder who told him?"

"Why, I hadn't thought of that!" cried Tom. "It's a dead give away for Mumford, because we haven't told a soul the watch was gone. What a contemptible fellow he is!"

"Yes. It is boys like him who are disgracing our colleges and bringing certain branches of athletics into bad repute. I hear Mumford is trying now to have some sort of a purse hung up for the winner of the Marathon, which, of course, he intends shall go to himself."

"And which will put him forever in the professional class."

"Exactly. But he claims this does not make a man a professional — that a purse merely raised by friends for the winner of the race, and not hung up by professional people in a professional way, does not constitute a professional act."

At this juncture there was a jumble of voices in the corridor and the rest of the "Inseparable Nine" burst into the room.

"What's the idea?" cried Pod, throwing him-

self in his usual place on Tom's trunk, while the other boys scattered about the room on the beds and chairs.

"We were just discussing professionalism, as applied to college athletics," said Chot. "Mumford, I understand, has suggested that a purse be hung up for the winner of the Marathon."

"Well, don't he realize that constitutes a breach in the amateur code?" Creighton wanted to know.

"I think he does. But he figures on winning the race, I'm told, and for that reason advocates the making of this purse among a few friends in the school."

"Wouldn't it be a joke if the purse was hung by his friends and you won it, Chot?" laughed Fleet.

"That would be impossible," Chot responded, "because I wouldn't be in the race if there was a purse. Nor would any other self-respecting boy in the school. Oh, don't worry, the Marathon will never be run for a purse. Mumford will withdraw his suggestion as gracefully as possible when he learns the sentiments of the other boys."

"Well, you're not going to let Mumford get away with the honors in the Marathon, anyway, Chot," said Bert.

"I'm not sure I'll run. There are plenty of boys in our class who can beat him — yourself and Tom, for instance, to say nothing of Wilkes and Truem."

"I'd like to have the pleasure of crossing the line ahead of Mr. Swell-Up," said Bert. "He's always so confident that he's going to win hands down."

His tone plainly expressed the disgust he felt at Mumford's conduct.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Pod —"we'll all enter."

"Excuse me!" cried Fleet. "I'm willing to recite a poem, but run a Marathon — never!"

"Don't let him off, Chot — he needs the exercise," said Randy.

"Glory be! Not little me!" said the fleshy lad, "but speaking of poems —"

"Here, now — cut that!" advised Dan Kirlicks. "This is a discussion of athletics — not a rhyme-fest. Lie down, boy — lie down!"

"Lie down, boy!" cried Pod, with a laugh. "He takes you for a dog," and he slapped Fleet on the knee with such force that the fleshy one cried out in pain.

"Dog or no dog!" he howled, "Don't do that again."

"Oh, by the way, speaking of cats," said Pod.

"Now, who said anything about cats?" Fleet demanded.

"Well, speaking of them, anyway, it isn't a great way to the end of a cat's nose, but it's fur to the end of its tail!"

"Choke him!" advised Randy. "That one came down from the Garden of Eden."

"Sure; Adam told me that himself," grinned Pod.

"But, getting back to this question of professionalism," said Bert, "it's pretty hard on the fellows who have to play ball in the summer to earn enough to defray their expenses at college the following year."

"I admit all that, Wilkes," Chot replied, "yet the rule exists, and in all other respects it is a just one, and as long as it does exist I am for it, heart and soul. There has been too much underhand work in our colleges, such as the bringing of professional players into the institutions under assumed names, and the foisting of these men on an unsuspecting public as amateurs. As you say, the rule barring professionals is hard on the poor boys, but did it ever occur to you that the majority of these poor boys could find some other occupation

during their vacation, which, if not so remunerative, would at least help them through their next year, and give them an opportunity to work for the glory of their Alma Mater on track and field?"

"Yes, I had thought of that," Wilkes admitted. "I'm not defending the boys who play salaried ball, Chot. Don't mistake me. I merely have a soft spot in my heart for those who are so unfortunately situated as to believe that to be the only way out of their difficulties."

"Yet, as Chot says, there are many other occupations," said Truem. "Dozens of college men may be found in the summer hotels during their vacation, waiting on table for board and keep, and laying up most of the meager salary they receive for the service."

"And others work on farms or solicit business for firms in various branches of industry," said Tom. "The latter, if not always a salaried position, offers a good commission, and the harder a fellow works, the better the results."

"To sum the whole matter up in a few words," said Chot, "if the present rule which bars the professional from college sport is working a hardship on a few deserving men, the results would be infinitely worse should the rule be abolished. The

colleges would then put a premium on professionalism, and the competition would become so intense that college sport as we know it now would be doomed forever. No, no, boys — it is hard to find a rule that does not work some injustice. The only solution, in this instance, is for the fellow who wants to become a credit to his Alma Mater in any branch of sport, to refuse money for his services in that line until he leaves the college."

"To which remark I am very happy to put my stamp of approval," said Pod.

"Your stamp of approval!" sniffed Fleet. "Your stamp on anything — even a letter — wouldn't amount to much."

"Sometime when you're reposing peacefully on the green grass, debating as to how you will be able to worry your friends with another so-called poem, I'll just stamp on your stomach to prove that I am some pumpkins, after all," said the little fellow.

"Yes, you do," advised Fleet, "and see what happens to you. Why, I'd take you by the seat of your trousers and the nape of your neck, and —"

The end of Fleet's threat was never heard, for there came a sudden rap at the door, and he cut his speech off abruptly.

Following an invitation from Chot to enter, Will Siddons came into the room.

"Oh, how are you, Siddons?" said Chot, in a friendly manner. "Pardon me for not getting up — I thought it was one of our crowd."

"That's all right, Mr. Duncan. No apology is necessary. I bear a challenge to you from Mr. Mumford."

"What, another?" queried Chot, with a smile. "And what is the nature of this challenge?"

"Mr. Mumford desires you to engage in a fencing match — merely a little friendly bout for points, he of course, representing the plebe, you the yearling class."

"Thank Mr. Mumford for his consideration in singling me out for this honor. I have never engaged in such a contest but say that I accept his challenge. I have not the reputation he has with the foils, but if the honor of our respective classes is at stake, I shall endeavor to make things interesting."

"Have you any suggestion to make as to the time the bout shall take place?"

"I am willing to suit Mr. Mumford's pleasure."

"I assume that the gym will be an acceptable spot to you?"

"Yes."

"Then shall we call the bout for to-morrow afternon after classes?"

"That is satisfactory to me, Mr. Siddons. Good-day, sir — glad you called."

Siddons, murmuring some commonplace remark, bowed himself out.

"Well, the blow has fallen," said Tom, with a yawn.

"Yes, and Mumford will find a surprise in store for him," said Wilkes, in a tone that carried conviction. "My pupil will surely do himself proud."

"Let us hope so," smiled Chot. "Mumford is apt to be overconfident, and if so, it may work to my advantage."

"Verily," said Pod. "You are too modest. I predict that the enemy will be put to utter rout, with his tail between his legs, and the bit in his teeth, as the poet says."

"Speaking of poets," said Fleet, "it is to the leader of the yearlings, Mr. Courtney Duncan, that I beg to dedicate my latest poem."

Before they could stop him he was on his feet and had launched into the following:

"Here's to the lad with the keen, snappy eye —
Here's to the lad, I say,

Who, with his foil, to-morrow will spoil
A rival's record at play."

"Oh, not so bad for an extemporaneous effort," said Tom. "How much better to sit down and write those things out, though, so you can smooth off the rough edges."

"Why, Fleet's fame as a poet has been won, not from a point of literary merit, or the absolute precision of his rhythm," said Chot, "but through his ability to rise to any occasion, and compose his verses as he goes. That, I say, my friends," Chot concluded grandiloquently, "is an achievement worthy of a Socrates, a Plato or a Cæsar!"

"What I want to know," said Pod, "is whether Plato did Cæsar."

"The verses were bad, but that was worse," said Dan.

"Then instead of going from bad to verse, we went from verse to bad," grinned Pod.

From out on the parade ground the signal for tattoo sounded, and the room was quickly emptied as the boys hurried out of the barracks for the evening roll call.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FENCING BOUT

THERE was a hum of excitement in the ranks of the cadets the next morning when it was learned that Darcy Mumford had challenged Chot Duncan to a fencing bout, and Chot had accepted. There was also considerable speculation as to the outcome, and the impression seemed to prevail that Chot would at last meet his match. He had never been known to use the foils while at Winton. Darcy, on the other hand, seemed to practice almost continually, and it was a well known fact that he had a pair of rapiers of his own which he guarded jealously on all occasions.

Roy Damon probably voiced the sentiments of the majority of the cadets when he said to Willis Harney:

"Duncan has nerve to tackle an expert fencer. He could have backed down very gracefully by saying he was not familiar with the game, and no one would have thought the less of him — that is, no one whose opinion he cares a fig for."

"But he may be able to fence better than we know," Willis replied.

"I think not. No; it's just a case of pure nerve, and while I always admire a fellow with nerve, I believe it can sometimes be carried too far. Duncan probably feels that he would rather be defeated by the plebe than admit he's no fencer."

"Well, Duncan has proven a surprise to us in many ways — perhaps he will in this," said Arnim, who was standing nearby.

With one or two exceptions, every cadet in the school was at the gym that afternoon after classes. Winton had not had a real fencing bout in a long time, and the boys looked forward with interest to a test of skill between the representatives of the plebe and yearling classes.

Dill Newman was there, scowling darkly, his perpetual grouch grown more intense than ever at the sight of Chot Duncan stripped to shirt and trousers, ready for the contest and apparently in the best of humor.

"Now, remember," Dill hissed in Darcy's ear, as the latter was unwrapping his rapiers, "you must injure him so that he'll be unable to use his right arm any more. He has no suspicion of anything of the sort, and it shouldn't be a hard thing to do."

"Leave it to me — I'll fix him all right," was Darcy's reply. "I hardly know what to make of

this business, though. Duncan brought his own private foil. I never imagined he had such a thing."

"It is funny," mused Dill. "Oh, well, it's some old relic he's had tacked on the wall of his room, I suppose. He thinks by using it he will scare you into thinking you're up against an expert."

"Well, he can't scare me," was the plebe's reply, as he began to divest himself of his collar and jacket.

Chot had chosen Tom as his second, and Will Siddons was to perform the same office for Darcy. When the matter of a referee came up, Willis Harney was chosen, Darcy suggesting him, greatly to Chot's surprise and pleasure.

Harney's first act, however, startled Darcy.

"Gentlemen," said the third classman, "let me see your foils."

Chot immediately passed his over for inspection. Darcy seemed somewhat reluctant, but finally complied with Harney's wish. The referee handed Chot's weapon back, and subjected the other to a careful scrutiny.

"Why, what's this?" he cried suddenly. "The button on the end of your foil is loose, Mr. Mumford."

"That so?" returned Darcy, with all the coolness he could muster. "I hadn't noticed."

"Then it's a good thing I examined the weapon. It might have become detached during the contest without you being aware of it. You might thus have unwittingly done your opponent a serious injury."

"Then I'm glad you found it," said the plebe. "I hadn't looked at the point. I supposed the button to be perfectly secure. I haven't used that foil for several weeks — preferring the other one for ordinary practice work — and it has probably worked loose in the interval. Shall I use the other foil?"

"By all means. It is best to take no chances."

Putting the discarded weapon back in its case, Darcy took up the second foil and handed it to Willis.

"This is all right," anounced the referee after a moment's inspection.

Dill Newman ground his teeth in rage.

"Curse that fellow, Duncan!" he muttered. "Just his confounded good luck. But I'll get him before I leave Winton — in some way, I'll get him!"

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" asked Harney.

"Ready," announced Chot.

"Ready," came quickly from Darcy.

The masks were quickly adjusted, and the two young athletes stood face to face in the cleared space on the floor.

"Salute!" cried Harney.

The boys responded with a clear sweep of their foils.

"On guard!"

The proper positions were as quickly assumed.

"Engage!"

With a low click the foils touched and slid along each other lightly.

Mumford had made up his mind that he would humiliate Chot as deeply as possible by scoring point after point and finally disarming him, so he lost no time in pressing the fighting.

Those who expected to see Chot give way immediately before the rush of the plebe — and they were in the majority — received a surprise; for the next sixty seconds there was such a display of agility and skill as they had never before witnessed in a contest between amateurs. Mumford easily sustained his reputation of being a skillful swordsman; but Chot Duncan, with little or no reputation in that line, more than justified himself, and in his

first five attempts Darcy failed to count upon his opponent. A quick side step, a backward leap or a turn of the wrist served to keep Chot out of harm's way.

Chot then began to give ground slowly, feeling his opponent out. Twice only did he try to count, and each time Darcy evaded his thrust with ease.

"This looks like the real thing to me," said Roy Damon. "I didn't know Duncan had it in him."

"There are many things in that chum of mine that most people do not suspect," said Fleet Kenby.

Darcy was panting from his exertions now. He had assumed the defensive, but, greatly to his surprise, his thrusts had been easily evaded, and Chot, exerting himself no more than was absolutely necessary, seemed content with giving ground. Before Darcy's eyes as he fenced flashed a picture of Chot giving ground before him in their fistic battle in old Fort Granger — also a picture of the finish of that strenuous battle. He gritted his teeth. Could it be possible, he asked himself, that this yearling even had a few tricks in fencing up his sleeve, and was waiting only for the proper moment to bring them forth to amaze and discomfit his rival? Darcy could not believe it.

The plebe decided to try one of his best tricks,

in the hope of scoring the first count. Chot saw it coming when too late. It was in many respects the same trick that Wilkes had taught him in the shadows of Walnut Grove, and before he could evade it, Darcy had counted.

"I didn't think Mumford knew that thrust," muttered Wilkes, who was an interested spectator of the bout.

"Well, it looks as if Mumford is going to get him after all," said Arnim, "and, frankly, I hate to see it. Up to now Duncan has contented himself with being on the defensive. Do you suppose he planned his battle along those lines, figuring that if he did not register a single count during the contest, he could likewise keep the other fellow from doing so?"

"Don't know," said Damon. "He certainly keeps his composure remarkably well."

"Methinks there will yet be a surprise," said Fleet, with a wink.

Both fencers were more on the alert than ever now. Darcy had a slight advantage, and intended to keep it. Chot was just as firmly resolved to even the score and go his opponent one better. He was getting familiar with Darcy's style of fencing now, and suddenly parrying a lightning thrust, he coun-

tered so swiftly that even Wilkes gasped in amazement. Chot counted fairly!

Honors were even. A cheer went up from the yearlings, but a hush fell again as Darcy, with a sudden rush, began backing his opponent around the floor. Every trick he knew he tried. Around and around Chot he worked, seeking an opening, and finding none. Chot's defense was fully as wonderful as the plebe's skillful thrusts, many of which were evaded by a hair's breadth.

At last came the moment when Darcy decided to try again the thrust which had scored his only count. He did not know that Chot Duncan had been waiting for this very thing! The other time Chot had been taken off his guard, not believing that Darcy knew the trick; but Wilkes Davis had taught him how to parry that thrust and Chot had been patiently biding his time until the plebe was ready to try it again.

When Darcy, with shortened guard, dropped low like a flash until the fingers of his left hand rested on the floor, Chot made a quick leap to one side, and Darcy's thrust missed its mark. Before the plebe could recover his guard, Chot flung himself forward, precisely in the position that Darcy had assumed a moment before. There was no time for

the plebe to recover his balance and get out of the way, and Chot's foil, flashing out in a long thrust, counted squarely again.

"Wow!" cried Pod Meelick. "That's what I call beating the enemy at his own game."

Chot had the advantage now, and did not hesitate to press it. Darcy, angered, found himself on the defensive for the first time during the contest. Finally he rallied, and for a moment there was quick, sharp work, but Chot avoided his enemy's thrusts with comparative ease.

Could it be possible that Chot was his equal with the foils? Darcy could not bring himself to believe it. Or his superior? As that thought surged through his mind Darcy exposed himself in a reckless attempt to secure another count and thus again make the honors even.

To Tom all this was very gratifying. He knew that Chot had been waiting for the time when his opponent would lose his temper — knew that by his clever work and his cool smile Chot was purposely provoking the plebe to anger.

Now, throwing himself on the offensive again, Chot counted twice before Darcy realized the true import of the assault.

Dill Newman grew pale with anger. He had

reckoned that Darcy would at least humiliate the boy they both hated, but here was Chot Duncan scoring on the plebe almost at will. It was too much for the fourth classman, and he turned away. But something about the contest drew him back, and he found himself looking on again with fascinated gaze.

As for Darcy, his whole being seethed with bitter disappointment. His work covering a period of several years to perfect himself in the art of fencing had been of no avail against this cool yearling, who, though he had a private foil of his own, had never been known to fence in the gym. How did he keep in practice? Darcy demanded of himself an answer to the question, but found none ready. Then came his downfall. He thought again of his fistic battle with Chot in the old fort. What a similarity there was between that and this! Chot, he realized, had played a waiting game on both occasions.

He rallied quickly as Chot made a desperate attack, and tried to hold his own, but the old-time spirit of bravado had left him, and with it part of his skill. Every trick that Wilkes had taught him, Chot now brought into play, scoring four times in succession on his thoroughly disconcerted rival.

A feeling of pity stole over Chot at the woebe-

gone expression on Darcy's face; but the contest had been of the plebe's seeking, and Darcy must go on now until the end.

Chot's face took on a hard expression as he again pressed the fighting, and a moment later Darcy felt his sword slip from his hand, as Chot, by a peculiar twist, sent it clattering to the floor some ten feet away.

Darcy threw up his hand as a token of submission, and turned away, sick at heart, while Siddons went to pick up the foil.

Chot, now feeling sorry in his heart for the boy he had defeated, walked over to where Darcy was standing.

"Mumford, will you shake hands?" he asked.

"No!" hissed the plebe, a look of hatred coming into his eyes. "No, Chot Duncan!" he continued in a low, tense voice, but one audible to every cadet in the building, "I will never shake hands with you!"

"As you will," said Chot, "but don't forget that I offered."

He turned back for the congratulations of his chums, while Darcy and Will, the latter with the foils under his arm, disappeared through the door of the gym in the direction of the barracks.

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE SHOOTING GALLERY

For the next few days Hoki avoided Chot and Tom. He had promised Darcy Mumford to mention nothing of the incident on the parade ground until the plebe leader had had an opportunity to discover if the man he claimed to have purchased the watch from was the real culprit, and the last thing the little Jap would ever do would be to break his word.

Had he known of Darcy's treachery — that the plebe, in return for the humiliation he had forced on himself that day in the gym, when Hoki had thrown him with amazing ease, was trying to poison the minds of the Comrades against him — it is difficult to say what the plucky little foreigner would have done. But of this he was in ignorance. He fretted continually because Tom did not come to him and tell him the watch had been found and the thief discovered.

Tom, on the other hand, saw in Hoki's continued evasion of him and Chot an act of suspicion, and he began to ask himself again if the Jap could really have taken the watch.

Finally, the shooting gallery, which had been under erection in the gym, superintended by Dick Kershaw, the tall plebe from Montana, was finished, and Commandant Cullom requested that all cadets be at the gym on a certain evening to thank Mr. Kershaw in person for the donation, and to try the new apparatus. To this arrangement the cadets assented with alacrity. Kershaw was well-liked, and if he chose to spend some of his father's surplus cash in fitting up a gallery which would remain a permanent feature at Winton, they surely had no objections.

The commandant was present, himself, and after making a neat little talk, presented Dick, who was given three cheers and a tiger. Then Dick, in modest terms, thanked the cadets for their approval; said he wasn't used to speech-making, and begged to be excused from such an effort. He would, he said, to make the evening interesting, be glad to represent the plebe class in a shooting match.

However much certain of the cadets deplored the fact that they would be required to exhibit their shooting abilities before such an expert as Dick was known to be, they, nevertheless, could not well refuse the invitation. The fourth class did finally beg off, claiming that they had no good marksmen

in their ranks. So it was decided that the contest should be between representatives of the first, second and third classes.

Dick Kershaw agreed to set the ball rolling by making the first trial. The contest was to be for the best out of twenty-five shots.

The cadets could not but admire the Montana boy, as he stepped up to the rail and faced the target, a Winchester .22 repeater in his hands. His grace of movement, the manner in which he coolly brought the weapon to his shoulder, bespoke for him great knowledge of firearms.

Bang! The first shot rang out and the gong on the target sent back an answering ring. Then, in rapid succession, the plebe fired, until the magazine of the rifle was empty, scoring sixteen shots without a miss.

"Great work!" cried Will Siddons, who, with Darcy and several other plebes, stood near by, anxious that Kershaw should be the victor in the contest.

Darcy was wondering who would shoot for the yearlings. As yet, the candidate of the second class had not been announced. They would soon know, however, for Dick had picked up another rifle and was preparing to finish.

"Sure, an' I like the way he handles a gun," said Fiske Murphy. "This is one toime where the plebes win, and don't you forget it."

"Don't be too sure," said Truem Wright, who overheard the remark.

"I did not address you, sir," said the Irish lad.

"No, but I addressed you," returned Truem, smiling.

Dick Kershaw missed the first shot with the second weapon. Then the gong began to ring again. He had made twenty shots out of twenty-one, when, to the surprise of the plebes, he missed again, then finished out his quarter hundred without another miss.

"Kershaw, twenty-three out of twenty-five," announced Arnim, who had been asked to make a note of the scores. "Who represents the yearlings?" he queried, turning to where the Comrades, and a group of others were standing.

There was a moment's pause, then Tom Pratt stepped forward and took his place at the rail of the shooting gallery. He picked up one of the loaded rifles and subjected it to a casual inspection, then raised it to his shoulder.

Bang! There was no answering gong for the first shot!

"Watch him make a monkey of himself," said Darcy Mumford, turning to Will Siddons.

The remark was made in a low tone, but not too low for Tom to hear. He turned coolly to Mumford:

"That word 'watch' sounds quite familiar to me, Mumford," he said in a quiet, yet significant tone, and Darcy turned a shade paler, as he recalled the incident of a few days previous.

"That was a strange remark," said Joe Reagan, and a look of understanding passed between him and Darcy.

"What did he mean?" asked Fred Whittington. "The remark had no point to me."

"I'm sure I haven't the slightest idea what he meant," replied the plebe leader, but his tone belied his words.

Ping! Ping! Ping! The bell rang in rapid succession as Tom began shooting again. When the magazine was exhausted, he had registered fifteen out of the sixteen shots, and Dick Kershaw was beginning to regard his rival in genuine surprise. He did not know that Tom had had extended experience in New Mexico.

Tom picked up the second weapon and rang the bell on the first shot.

"Seventeen!" One of the cadets was counting aloud. Then it went on, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four!

"Ah!" sighed Chot. "He has one more shot. He has at least tied Kershaw's record."

Again Tom's rifle went to his shoulder. Then there was a cheer from the yearlings as again the bell sent forth its answering ping!

Tom had beaten the plebe from the west by a single shot!

"Pratt, twenty-four out of twenty-five," announced Arnim, marking it down.

Dick Kershaw stepped forward, hand extended.

"Mr. Pratt, I want to congratulate you," he said. "I confess I didn't think there was a boy in the east who could do that. I hope to have the pleasure of shooting with you frequently."

"Thank you," said Tom. "I am sure you were not quite in form to-night."

"It's generous of you to say that, but I know when I'm defeated and am not ashamed to acknowledge it."

This manly statement was made in a tone audible to everyone, and Dick Kershaw, in that moment, won the respect and regard of every cadet in

the school, with the possible exception of Dill Newman, and Darcy Mumford and his cronies.

"Third class!" cried Arnim. "Where's your man?"

"Here he is!" said Willis Harney, pushing Roy Damon on to the floor.

"Humph!" cried Fiske Murphy. "He'll have to make the whole twenty-five shots to win. I don't believe he can do it."

Damon was cool and collected, and when he began shooting, it was seen that he was no novice. Ten shots rang the gong in succession. Then he missed two, but kept on until the magazine was empty. He had made fourteen out of the sixteen. But when he took up the second rifle he appeared slightly nervous.

Crack! The rifle spoke, but the bullet did not come within three inches of the bull's-eye.

"Say, but that was a rotten shot!" cried a voice in the crowd.

"Who said that?" demanded Arnim, turning quickly toward the cadets. No one answered. "Speak up! Such remarks are not fair and are calculated to spoil Mr. Damon's aim. Who said it?"

"I'm no tattler," said Ben Ardsley, "but the

voice certainly wasn't very many feet from me."

All eyes were quickly turned in his direction, and when a look of chagrin spread over Dill Newman's face, all realized that he had been the offender.

Arnim flashed the fourth classman one contemptuous glance, then signaled Roy to go on shooting.

"It was my fault — it was a bad shot," Damon admitted.

"But we all make them," said Dick Kershaw, with a genial smile.

Damon seemed to steady down after the interruption, and made his remaining shots without a miss.

"Damon, twenty-two out of twenty-five," announced Arnim.

"And that's a record to be proud of," said Dick, extending his hand. "Will you shake, Damon?"

"Certainly," replied Roy.

As Damon walked away, several of the plebes surged toward Dick. Darcy Mumford was the first to extend his hand.

"Never mind, Kershaw," he said, with a supercilious tilt to his chin, "we'll get that yearling bunch at something yet."

"Mr. Mumford," responded Dick frankly, "I'll

shake hands with you, but I want to tell you that I did not like your conduct at the fencing match a few days since."

"What do you mean?" demanded the plebe leader, flushing.

"That little matter of the button. It is a good thing for you, as well as for Mr. Duncan, that the referee discovered how loose it was."

"Do you mean to insinuate — ?" Darcy began, when the other cut him short.

"I insinuate nothing. I merely say that, in the interests of clean sport, I do not like to see such things occur," and turning on his heel, he walked away.

"So he suspects me?" muttered Darcy, gazing after the tall form of the boy from Montana. "And he refuses my friendship? Well, I'll make him sorry, too!"

"What are you muttering about?" asked Will Siddons.

"You heard what he said — how unjust he was!" cried Darcy.

"Yes; but you'll find that there is considerable discussion in the school about that little incident. The verdict of the cadets is that it was very careless of you, to say the least."

"Sure, he's right about it," said Fiske Murphy. "I've heard 'em talkin' mesilf."

"'Them'? Who do you mean by 'them'?" demanded Darcy.

"Begorra, I referred to no special persons — all classes are unanimous in their opinions."

"Oh, the fellows in this school are a lot of numbskulls. They're always ready to jump on a fellow no matter what happens!"

"No use gettin' sore, Darcy, me boy," advised Murphy. "The plain fact of the matter is, you're sore because Duncan's beaten you at ivery turn. I've no love for him mesilf, but I always admire a good sport, and he's one, just as sure as I'm Irish."

"Oh, well, there's no use arguing with you!"

"Not a bit of it," responded Fiske, coolly.

With a shrug, Darcy linked his arm in Will's and led him off to the other side of the gym away from the crowd.

"Darcy's fixin' to get expelled as sure as I'm a foot high," muttered the Irish lad. "He's losin' friends by the dozen, and he never had many dozen to lose. Well, I'm goin' to kape my skirts clear of the mess. No one shall iver say thot Fiske Murphy has done a dishonest thing."

With this resolve Fiske joined a crowd of plebes

who were discussing the Marathon, which was now but ten days off.

In the meantime, Dick Kershaw, having been congratulated by his classmates, was now the recipient of considerable attention from the yearlings, all of whom admired him for his good-natured remarks in the face of a defeat that must have rankled not a little.

"By the way, Kershaw, you have the build of a runner," said Bert Creighton. "Why don't you enter the Marathon?"

"I don't mind telling you that I had intended doing that very thing. I can run some — in fact, running and shooting, with a little baseball on the side, about exhaust my talents, so far as sports are concerned."

"Well, you should enter the Marathon," said Chot. "I hold that each class should have three or four runners in the race — or as many more as they desire. Very often a class loses out completely in an athletic event — especially if it is a test of endurance — through some accident to its sole representative. But if they are represented by more than one person, it is hardly likely that accidents will happen to all."

"I see what you mean, and it is a good point,"

said Dick. "I shall enter. I'm in pretty good training. I get plenty of exercise on my father's ranch in Montana, you know, and it won't take very long for me to get in shape."

"Montana," mused Chot. "I suppose you are not familiar with Colorado, Mr. Kershaw?"

"Why, yes, I am, to a certain extent. My father has some mining interests in that state."

"You don't happen to know a man named Pendleton, do you?"

"Luther Pendleton?" queried Dick.

"Why, yes," said Chot, with a slight start. "You know him?"

"Quite well," said the plebe, a queer look coming into his eyes.

"Have you known him long?"

"Well, for some little time, yes. Is Mr. Pendleton a particular friend of yours?" He laid heavy stress on the question.

"No," was Chot's reply.

"I am glad."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because he is interested in a mining proposition out there that isn't quite fair and square," replied the boy from Montana.

The comrades exchanged significant glances.

CHAPTER XX

PREPARING FOR THE MARATHON

CHOT found no time to further question Dick Kershaw about Luther Pendleton, but he resolved that he would, at the first opportunity, seek out the Montana lad, tell him why he was interested in Mr. Pendleton's affairs, and ask him frankly what he knew of the doings of Lucy's father in Colorado. From the significant tone in which Dick had spoken when asking if Mr. Pendleton was a friend, Chot felt that Dick knew something about the Comrades' mining partner that would not look well in print.

In the meantime, those who had decided to run in the Marathon were in strict training. Road work and dieting were the principal features. Arnim had entered the race, representing the fourth class; Damon and Ardsley were representing the third class; the yearlings had put Duncan, Pratt and Creighton in the field, while in the plebe ranks, four boys — Kershaw, Mumford, Murphy and Nagasuki — announced their intention of entering the contest.

Chot, Tom and Bert took their road work together, usually running off to the west away from the river towns, out into the peace and quietude of the open country. On such occasions the world and everything in it seemed bright and gay to them. Hedges and evergreens lined the way in many places, and the smell of the pines, as they dashed through an occasional patch of timber, made them long to work their lungs overtime, and to carry the pleasant odor back to the school with them.

These runs were taken, for the most part, in the late afternoon and early evening. The days were growing shorter, and on more that one occasion myriads of stars were gleaming in the sky before they turned for their run back to the gym, which they always tried to reach in time for a bath and rub down before the signal for lights out was given.

Commandant Cullum was lenient in the matter of demerits for cadets who were late through this cause, however, which made the boys more than ever anxious to please the man who ruled the destinies of Winton Hall.

One evening, Chot, feeling in better form than Tom and Bert, announced his intention of running

ahead of them back to the school. They had just turned, some six miles in the country, for their dash toward home.

"Go ahead," said Tom. "I, for one, am going to take it easy."

"And I," Bert chimed in. Then, smiling, he hummed: "Oh, just tell them that you saw me!"

"I'll do that!" Chot flung over his shoulder, as he started off at a rapid pace. The blood was coursing swiftly through his veins, and he felt that he might make a record run back to the gym. Inspired by the thought, he soon left his companions far to the rear.

It was dark now, save for the light shed by the stars, but the white, sandy road was plainly visible as it stretched in a straight line ahead.

"Gee, but it's good to be living," breathed Chot, as he dashed along. "Too bad more fellows can't appreciate the benefits of running. Too bad! Too bad!"

His wind was fine; his breaths came in long, even rotation; he scarcely felt the effort he was making, though he was traveling at a rapid pace.

"Didn't know I was in such good form," he muttered. "If this keeps up, I'll make some of those fellows hump in the Marathon — I will!"

As he was passing a sloping bank, topped by a short-cut hedge, he was startled by a rustling sound. Then a dark form came lurching down the slope, collided with him, and together they rolled into the dirt. At first Chot thought this was an accident, but when he felt two hands clasp his throat, he was quickly dissillusioned. The man had evidently been lying behind the hedge waiting for the runner or some other pedestrian to come along.

"I wonder what valuables he thinks a man in a running suit would have?" thought Chot, as he strove to release the other's clasp from his neck. Taken at a decided disadvantage, Chot had been "the under dog" when the two fell to the ground, and his assailant was still on top, trying desperately to cut off his wind.

But now, bringing his full strength into play, Chot suddenly toppled the other off. Over and over they rolled in the road, with no sound save the rustling of the wind through the nearby trees, and of their own labored breathing.

Chot had no idea as to the identity of the man who had attacked him, but he was rather stockily-built and of about Chot's size. He had on a suit of business clothes, with the collar turned up about the throat, and a slouch hat pulled well over his

eyes, and when Chot finally got a look at the fellow's face, he saw that the features were concealed by a mask.

So it was a highwayman after all?

The hold on Chot's throat relaxed suddenly as Chot plunged his knee into the other's stomach. For a moment it looked as if Chot had won out, but his antagonist squirmed and twisted so effectually, that the cadet was unable to plant another telling blow.

Over and over, locked in each other's arms, they rolled again, nearer and nearer to the left edge of the road, where a deep ditch yawned before them, partly filled with water from the recent rains.

Simultaneously the combatants realized the close proximity of the ditch. Neither had any desire for a bath, for the air was chilly, and the water sure to be at a temperature not far above the freezing point. So back into the road they struggled, as if by mutual consent.

Chot became suddenly aware that his assailant was making a desperate effort to twist his right arm. A strange proceeding, thought the boy, for surely there were more vulnerable points to attack. He stopped the other's efforts in this direction by a quick turn, then tore himself loose and

staggered to his feet. As his assailant also arose with the intention of continuing the struggle, Chot's arm shot out and caught him squarely on the jaw. The fellow staggered back, clutching at space with his hands, then plunged full length into the dust.

As he rose again, Chot sent him down with another blow. He repeated this three times, at the end of which his antagonist mumbled in a hoarse voice:

"That's enough — that's enough!"

He sat still in the road, making no effort to rise.

"There's plenty more — don't be bashful!" advised Chot.

To this there was no answer.

"Well, if you really have enough, perhaps you'll take the time and trouble to explain this attack."

No answer.

"What's the matter with you, anyway? Is your tongue paralyzed? Take off that mask!"

"No!" said the other, sullenly. There was a familiar note in the voice, and Chot searched his memory to know where he had heard it before.

"Well, you'll just have to — that's all!"

At this juncture he heard the sound of footsteps. Someone was approaching from behind, evidently

Tom and Bert, jogging along at their customary easy pace. A moment later Chot's chums hove in sight through the darkness, their moving forms outlined dimly against the light background of the road.

"Pull up, fellows," said Chot, as they came near.

"Eh?" cried Tom in a startled tone. "What's wrong?"

"I've had a scrimmage with some fellow in the dark. Anybody got a match?"

"That's a funny thing to ask a fellow in a running suit," laughed Bert.

"That's right. Well, perhaps this gentleman has some in his pocket. I'm going to see the face behind that mask."

"Looks like you'd laid him out," commented Tom, with a glance at Chot's assailant, who was still in a sitting posture.

"Well, I'm sure I didn't get the worst of it," returned Chot. "Have you a match?" he asked, turning to the man in the road.

"Keep away — keep away!" warned the fellow, as Chot approached.

"So you don't give in yet, eh?" Chot demanded.

"No!"

"Then we'll have to give you a little further

treatment. Come boys; let's see if he has a match, then for a look at his face!"

Tom and Bert entered into the spirit of the adventure with a will, albeit the wind was chilly and their running suits thin. The man struggled fiercely, when he found himself in their grasp, but to no avail. When three stalwart college youths start out to do a thing, it is pretty hard to balk them in their desires.

Within six seconds Tom and Bert were holding the man securely and Chot was going through his pockets.

"Ah! A match, sure enough! In fact, a box of them. Now, tear off his mask, Tom!"

Tom after a struggle, did so. Then Chot, standing directly in front of the man, calmly struck a light and held the flickering flame up before him. Then he started back with a cry of amazement, for he saw before him the passion-inflamed features of Dill Newman!

"Newman!" cried Chot.

"What — you don't mean it!" This from Tom as he peered around. "Yes, by jove, it is!"

"I might have known this was some of your dirty work," said Chot.

"I swore I'd get you before I left Winton, Dun-

can, and I'll do it yet!" was the angry reply. Chagrined at being caught red-handed in his nefarious work, the fourth classman had thrown caution to the winds.

"If you get me before leaving Winton, you'll stay at the old school a long time yet," replied Chot, coolly. "Providing you are not expelled in the meantime," he added, significantly.

"Yes, I suppose you'll peach on me now — I can hardly look for anything else from you."

"Of course, you can't," said Tom. "This was a despicable thing to do — trying to catch a fellow unawares in the dark."

"Oh, go on; preach!" cried the fourth classman. "I don't mind what you say. I'm only sorry I didn't ruin Duncan's pitching arm for him."

"That is why you were twisting it so hard, eh?" asked Chot. "I thought there must be method in your apparent madness."

"If I could have ruined that arm," said Newman, with brutal frankness, "I wouldn't have cared what you did to me. If it hadn't been for that butt-in-sky, Willis Harney, Mumford would have queered you the other day in the gym, and this excursion to-night would have been unnecessary."

"What do you mean, Newman?"

"Oh, that's all right; I didn't mean to squeal on a pal. Forget it!"

"Don't you remember how Harney found the button loose on Mumford's foil?" asked Tom. "That must be what he means."

"And that was a trick of these fellows to run me through the arm? I see! What a nice pair of tricksters they are!" cried Chot, making no effort to conceal his contempt. "I thought you and Mumford had grown pretty chummy, considering the difference in your stations at Winton, and now the secret's out."

"I don't care if it is," said Newman, recklessly. "I'll get my walking papers for this, anyway, I suppose, so what's the use? But remember this, Duncan, there are many years coming after I leave Winton. Somewhere in this old world we'll meet again, and under more favorable circumstances for me."

"Circumstances will never be favorable for you, Newman, because you never fight fair. Ever since you came to Winton you have acted like a cad, and don't think for a moment that you'll be able to scare me with threats as to what you'll do to me after you leave the school. My luck has always been pretty good in dealing with such fellows

as you, and it's not going to desert me in the future. And now, as far as your being expelled for this attack to-night is concerned, forget it! I understand you are well up in your studies, and that in spite of your mean actions in other ways, you expect to graduate with high honors. Far be it from me to take those honors from you. As long as you leave me alone, just so long will my friends and I keep silent about this little episode. Now, turn him loose, boys, and let's get back to the school."

"Oh, you'll be sorry for this!" grated Newman.

"I didn't expect you to feel any gratitude over the fact that I refuse to have you expelled," said Chot. "I'm not doing it for your sake, personally, but because I would never forgive myself if I had been the means of making anyone fail in securing his education. Now, you understand me. Stand aside, and let us pass, and in the future keep as far away from me as our relative positions and circumstances will permit."

Newman stood aside, glaring at the three young athletes, then with a muttered curse disappeared up the bank and into the hedge from whence he had come.

"You're wrong in letting him stay at Winton,"

said Creighton with a dubious shake of the head.

"Maybe, so," was Chot's reply, "but you heard my views on the subject. They are final."

"What gets next to me is the way that scamp of a Mumford would have run you through the arm and made you believe it was an accident," said Tom, his teeth coming together with a sharp click.

"Well, fortunately, Willis forestalled him in that," said Chot. "I am glad, however, to know just how far these fellows are ready to go to injure me. I shall be on my guard in the future."

They were panting from their exertions when they reached the gym. A number of other boys were in the bath rooms, having come in from various directions. There was a great deal of chattering, some good-natured banter, and finally all headed across the parade ground toward the barracks — just in time, too, for barely had Chot and Tom undressed when they heard the signal for lights out.

"I wouldn't care if it was only six o'clock — the way I feel after that run would make me sleep like a top," yawned Chot, as he prepared to roll into bed.

"Me, too," said Tom with a nod, as he tumbled in, and rolled over with a contented sigh.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MARATHON RACE

THE course over which the Marathon was to be run was a triangle, starting west from Winton by the same road Chot, Tom and Bert had taken on their training jaunts. Ten miles out this road was the Omega Inn, famous for its fine service to automobilists and other travelers, and this would constitute the end of the first "leg" of the triangle. Here Wilkes Davis was stationed to mark the time and position of the runners, and to see each man safely on his way over the second "leg" to Stockdale, twelve miles away on the Hudson, and four and one-half miles below Winton. Here Willis Harney was stationed to again take the relative positions of the runners and to start them along the river bank on the last leg of the race. On the Winton parade ground a white-washed line had been drawn and here the final judges, Commandant Cullum and Cadet Captain John Lorry, and the timekeeper, Fleet Kenby, would await the finish. The entire course was approximately twenty-six miles, 385 yards,— the regular Marathon distance.

When the signal to get ready was given, the ten runners who had entered the race assembled near the starting point, casting aside their outer garments, and appearing in jerseys, running pants and light shoes, with short socks rolled down about their ankles. They were a fine looking lot of athletes as they stood there, their limbs glistening in the noonday sun, their eyes bright and eager for the most supreme test of endurance they had ever undergone at Winton.

As they stood there it seemed to the onlookers that every boy was in perfect physical trim. The days of training had apparently borne good results; yet the finish of the race was to prove that some of the boys were under and some over-trained.

There was considerable excitement among the cadets as the officials lined the runners up at the starting point, and had betting not been forbidden by the commandant, many wagers would have been made on the result.

The starter, in the person of the commandant himself, stood ready, pistol in hand. The runners poised for the start, eager to be on their way. The commandant lifted his arm. There was a puff of smoke, followed by a sharp report, and the runners broke away toward the west. The cadets

sent up a cheer, and stood watching until the sprinters crossed the railroad track below the depot, and went spinning along at a rapid pace toward the distant timber line.

Arnim, Kershaw and Creighton seemed to break away in the lead, setting a rapid gait for the first half mile, when they began to slow down, with Creighton in front, Kershaw second and Arnim third. The others were trailing behind in various positions.

Creighton drew slowly away, as if it were his intention to put enough ground between himself and the two boys directly behind him to force them into a spurt if they wished to catch up.

Could the cadets have seen the positions of the runners as they disappeared into the timber along a pretty stretch of sandy road, they would have indulged in considerable speculation; for Chot and Tom, admitted to be two of the finest runners in the school, were bringing up the rear, neck and neck. There was no bitter rivalry between these two. No matter who won the Marathon, they were ready to extend the heartiest of congratulations.

They were still in the rear as they passed through the timber and out onto the level stretch of road beyond.

"Here's where I had my tussle with Newman the other night," said Chot, as the familiar hedge began to glide past on their left.

Tom nodded.

"I recognize the spot," said he. "Too bad we didn't toss him into the ditch while we were about it."

On they went at a steady pace. They were nearly up with the last runner now. This proved to be Fiske Murphy, and the Comrades smiled genially as they overtook and passed him a moment later.

Just ahead now were Hoki and Ben Ardsley, running about together, the little Jap taking two steps to one for the larger boy, but running with noticeable ease. Past them went Chot and Tom, still together, and conversing occasionally in words of short syllables. There were five men ahead of them now, scattered out in distances ranging from ten yards to a quarter of a mile. Creighton was still leading, with Arnim a close second. Kershaw had dropped back to fourth place, Mumford going to third. Behind Dick, running rather laboriously, was Damon. And in this formation, with Roy but a few yards in advance of Chot and Tom, the turn was made at Omega Inn, where

Wilkes Davis, with a stop-watch, marked the time, and waved his hand encouragingly to all.

From here the run was across country for some six miles to the Stockdale road, which ran directly west from the village, finally turning to the south. The runners aimed to strike this road at its turn, from which point it was another six miles into Stockdale.

Shortly after leaving the inn there was a considerable change in the positions of the men. Creighton still held the lead by a narrow margin, Mumford was second, and Chot and Tom, still running neck and neck, had taken third and fourth positions away from Arnim and Kershaw.

The way lay across meadows, where the grass, sere and yellow from the first touches of frost, was short and the going easy, then into stretches of road, more or less rough, thence into paths through the woods — all of which was familiar ground to the cadets, whose excursions into this part of the country had been frequent.

Some runners chose one path, some another. The next objective point was Stockdale, and it mattered not how they reached there, so long as each boy appeared in person before Willis Harney, before starting on the last stretch of his journey.

The judges had pointed out the easiest and shortest way to Stockdale from the Omega Inn. If any of the runners thought they knew a better route, they were at liberty to try it.

Darcy Mumford was just ahead of Chot and Tom, now, conspicuous for the green running trunks he wore, and the latter grated his teeth in silent rage, as he looked at the fleeing plebe.

"I'd be willing to lose the race just to stop and punch that fellow in the face," he said in a low tone to Chot.

"Don't," was Chot's advice. "He's not worthy of so much attention."

A stone wall barred their way now, and Mumford, in trying to take it at a leap, stubbed his toe and fell sprawling. He was on his feet in an instant, and just in time to see Chot and Tom take the wall with easy leaps, smiling back at him disdainfully. When he started on again, he realized with considerable mortification that the Comrades were abreast of him.

"Oh, you fellows won't shake me this easy," he cried, flashing them an angry glance. "I'll be right with you at the finish, and you'll have to fight for every inch between here and there."

"Won't that be interesting?" replied Chot. "I

suppose you hope I'll fall and hurt my pitching arm," he added, in a significant tone.

"What do you mean?" asked the plebe, flushing up.

"What I said. Figure it out for yourself."

Then to Darcy's further chagrin, Chot and Tom forged ahead of him. He spurted slightly, but realized that he could never keep up the pace they were setting.

"Curse them! Curse them!" he cried, clenching his hands until the nails sank into the flesh. "They shan't beat me — they shan't! I'll win this race if I die for it!"

Ahead now, through a patch of timber, the Stockdale road could be seen. The boys had timed themselves nicely, and would strike the thoroughfare right at its turn. Then six miles in a straight line toward the river, and the second leg of the race would be a thing of the past.

Creighton still held the lead, but Chot and Tom were gaining on him steadily.

Mumford had taken another spurt and was coming rapidly, in spite of the fact that the pace was beginning to tell on him. From out the timber, not more than fifty yards in the rear of the plebe leader, Arnim and Kershaw now burst side by

side. They had made a considerable gain on the leaders during the last mile's run.

Mumford, throwing a glance over his shoulder, viewed their approach with much annoyance. He realized that he had already given the race the best that was in him. His wind was not what he expected it to be, and he knew now, when too late, that he had looked upon the Marathon with too much confidence — had not trained sufficiently to fit him for a run so long.

"But I'm going to win by hook or crook!" was his sudden resolve. Then, as a thought came to him, he smiled.

Slowing up, he let Arnim and Kershaw come up with him. Both were breathing heavily, yet were apparently strong. They passed him with a nod and he watched their moving legs as they receded down the road.

The time had come for decisive action if Darcy was to put his new plan into successful execution. He looked over his shoulder. The other runners had not yet come out of the timber. Then, with scarcely an instant's hesitation, the plebe left the road and cut through the woods toward a point on the river, half way between Winton and Stockdale!

"I'll be the first man to cross the line," he cried, in exultation. "They'll cry foul, but let them; they'll have to prove it, and my word is as good as Willis Harney's any day."

In the meantime, Creighton, with Chot and Tom but a few yards behind, was nearing Stockdale village, where Willis Harney, watch in hand, was waiting for them.

A quarter of a mile in the rear Arnim and Kershaw were still pounding along side by side. Far down the road several other figures could be seen, though the positions of the runners could not be determined.

"Three, five, seven, eight, nine," counted Harney. "One man has dropped out. Poor fellow! I suppose he was over-trained, and found his endurance to be less than he had expected."

Creighton nodded as he went by, and Harney smiled a return greeting, as he marked the time and position of the runner.

"Can't you fellows get away from each other?" he demanded of Chot and Tom, as they, too, dashed past. "As far as I could see you, you've been running together."

"It's because we love each other so," hummed Chot, as he smiled at Harney over his shoulder.

On down the road past Mrs. Lauder's boarding house, and Professor Strang's Preparatory School, now closed for the season, they went, pleasant memories surging uppermost in their minds, as they recalled the happy times they had had in this spot during their days at the professor's school — on down to the river bank, then turning up the shore toward Winton, four and one-half miles away.

They soon came abreast with Creighton.

"I expected this," said the big fellow, good-naturedly. "When we crossed the railroad track, just out of Winton, you fellows were last, but I knew doggone well you'd be up with me before we reached the finish."

"Well, the race is not over yet," said Chot, in an encouraging tone. "Perhaps we three fellows will run a tie."

"No such luck!" growled Bert.

The boys were beginning to feel the strain of the race, and as they jogged along up the shore, it seemed that they had been absent from the school for days. They had lost all track of time, but knew the race had consumed several hours.

Suddenly they were treated to a surprise. A familiar figure in green running trunks dashed

down the sloping bank to the shore about a hundred yards ahead, and with one fleeting glance to the rear, trotted off in the direction of the school.

"Well, what do you think of that?" gasped Tom.

"Eh? What, Tom?" cried Chot and Bert in one breath.

"Look ahead!"

"Mumford!" Chot exclaimed, as he recognized the boy in the green suit.

"He's cut through the woods. He'll be disqualified as soon as Harney makes his report of those who passed him at Stockdale," said Bert.

"But think of the nerve," said Chot. "He must have known that his triumph would be short lived even though he was the first to cross the line, which he won't be if I can help it."

"What are you going to do?"

"Beat him at his own game! Come on, now — all of us! There are only two more miles, and that fellow is almost fagged. That's why he took the short cut. He thought he'd get there before the rest of us, and without being seen. I suppose he figured it would be his word against Harney's. Foolish boy!"

"Then let's beat him!" cried Tom.

"I'm with you," said Creighton. "He should be shown that even unfair methods cannot put him ahead. That will be galling for him surely."

They quickened their pace and had the satisfaction of gaining perceptibly on the plebe. Darcy looked back suddenly, and divined their intentions. He too, spurted, but it was a short spurt, and a moment later he dropped into a stride even slower than before.

Chot and Tom, with Creighton trailing but a few yards behind, soon came up with him.

"Curse you! Curse you!" hissed the leader of the plebes. For a moment Chot thought Darcy was going to attack him, so great was his display of anger.

"Don't curse," advised Chot. "It won't do any good. Just wait till Harney makes his report."

"Don't talk that way to me, Chot Duncan! Oh, I could kill you for this!"

Darcy was so angered and mortified at being discovered in his treachery, he actually began to blubber.

"Don't take defeat so hard," said Tom. "No fellow can win by unfair tactics. You should know that. Let this be a lesson for you."

"A lesson!" came hotly from Creighton, ac-

companied by a contemptuous sniff. "He's had so many lessons since he came to Winton, that if he'd taken heed, he'd have been a model young man long before this."

Then, to Darcy's dismay, the boys left him behind and dashed on in the final lap of the race.

"Say," he called after them. "What are you fellows going to do about this? Are you going to give me away?" But there was no answer. The boys did not even turn, though Darcy's questions had been heard distinctly. "Curse them!"

Now came the most difficult part of the run — the climb up the bluff. Already this was lined with shrieking cadets, caps waving in the air. Winton seemed mad with excitement.

"Duncan! Duncan!" cried a score of voices.

"Pratt! Pratt!" and "Come on, Creighton!" came from still other factions.

And up the bluff the boys now plodded, Chot in the lead, Tom hanging tenaciously on but three yards behind, and Creighton but a short distance to the rear of Tom.

A shouting, pushing mass of cadets surged away from the edge of the bluff on to the parade ground, where the judges and the timekeeper were awaiting the arrival of the first runner.

"It's between Duncan and Pratt!" cried someone, as the two Comrades, Chot still leading by a few feet, dashed away from the bluff toward the white-washed line, now seen dimly in front of them. Each lad was almost ready to drop, but with a last test of endurance they revived the little surplus energy stored within them, and side by side — almost arm in arm — they staggered across the line. Tom had caught up his lost ground, and the chums had made a tie race of the great school Marathon!

Such shouting! The boys were seized and taken to where their friends were waiting with water and blankets, and sitting on the ground, Chot and Tom watched the other runners come in one after the other. First, Creighton, who was only ten yards behind, then Mumford, who trotted over the line, a hang-dog look on his face.

"Congratulations, Darcy!" cried Morton De Lange, running up to the plebe leader and pulling him off to the side where several of Darcy's cronies were gathered.

"Don't congratulate me!" gasped the plebe, loud enough for everyone to hear. "I'm disqualified! I found I couldn't stand the strain, so I cut through the woods. I haven't been to Stockdale at all!"

"He's saved himself by that!" said Chot, in a low tone to Tom. "It was the last straw, and he's trusting us not to tell on him."

"But it was a mean thing to do," was Tom's reply. "If you'll listen to me, you'll see that he's run out of Winton. The cad! To make everyone believe he dropped purposely out of the race! If he had been the first man in, and no one had seen him make the cut off, he'd have sworn he passed Harney in Stockdale, and that Willis was trying to disqualify him because he disliked him."

Chot shared Tom's disgust, but he said nothing.

Up the bank, now, came Dick Kershaw — the first of the plebes to reach the finish. The lad from the west had finally passed Arnim. The fourth classman appeared a moment later, however. Then, in turn, at intervals of a few minutes, came Damon, Nagasuki, Murphy and Ardsley.

The great race was over at last, and Chot and Tom had divided the honors.

There was a hush as the timekeeper prepared to announce the time.

"Time!" cried Fleet, holding up his hand for silence. "Distance, twenty-six miles, 385 yards. Time of winners, Duncan and Pratt, two hours and fifty minutes!"

There was another cheer. The great record for a Marathon made by St. Yves at the Polo Grounds, New York, was two hours, forty minutes, fifty and two-fifths seconds. And that was a smooth track record. Chot and Tom, over a poorer road, and a course that lead partly across country, had come within ten minutes of equaling that time.

Wilkes Davis had arrived from the Omega Inn some time before on a bicycle, and Harney now came in from Stockdale by the same method of locomotion. Then these two got together with Fleet and compared their time. Fleet's total time for each runner was found to be correct to a second.

"There is only one thing to report in connection with the race," said Harney. "One man — Mumford — is disqualified. He never came to Stockdale."

He looked pointedly at the plebe as he spoke.

"Oh, I've explained that," said Darcy, flushing. "I couldn't stand the strain, so I cut across lots."

Then, with many a suspicious gaze directed at him, he arose, and with Will Siddons, set out in advance of the others for the gym.

CHAPTER XXII

THE MATTER OF THE WATCH

"HUMPH!" growled Darcy Mumford. "I wonder what this means?"

He and Will Siddons were alone in their room a few nights later.

"What do you mean by 'this'?" asked Will.

"A note. It's from Tom Pratt. Listen!" Clearing his throat, he read as follows: "'Your presence is requested in my room at seven o'clock to-night on a matter of the greatest importance. Please signify if you will come.' Now what do you make of that?"

"I don't know what to make of it, unless it has something to do with your cutting across lots in the Marathon."

"Well, I've made all the explanation I'm going to about that. I've talked and talked and talked, and they don't believe me. I'm sick and tired of Winton, anyway, and if things don't brighten up before another year, I'll never be a yearling — not here, at any rate!"

"Well, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but it's mostly your own fault."

"Yes; so you've hinted before. But what do you expect me to do — toady to this fellow Duncan and his crowd?"

"No; but you could have been on the level. I don't care for that bunch, as you know, but, like Fiske Murphy, I don't believe in adopting unfair tactics. You'll find that the fellow who can't take defeat with a smile, and extend his hand in heartiest congratulation to the victor, will never get on very well in this old world of ours. There are too many hard knocks coming to the majority of us to make things worse by playing a crooked game."

"Well, I haven't been accustomed to hard knocks. I've had pretty much my own way all my life."

"That's the trouble — you've been petted and pampered until you have grown to think yourself invulnerable. There are fellows at Winton who can beat you fighting, running and fencing, and because you're too proud to acknowledge it, you go around with a grouch, blaming your friends for 'turning against you,' as you term it. They are not turning against you, Darcy, but they saw the error of your ways long ago. You've had a fine opportunity here at Winton. From the very first you were chosen to lead the plebes. That is an

honor not to be taken lightly, yet it does not mean that your class expects you to do the impossible. No — no; you've had a wrong idea of life since you came here, and if you'll accept a well-meant suggestion from one who has always been, and still is, your friend, you'll cut it out, acknowledge that you haven't been on the square, and show your determination to turn over a new leaf. That's a pretty long speech for me, but if it helps you out of the mess you're in, why, I'm glad I made the effort."

"I've grown tired of your sermons, Will," sneered the other. "I'll not eat humble pie for anyone. I'm not built that way."

"Well, it was not my intention to preach, but I shouldn't have had a clear conscience had I not warned you once more."

"Well, that's not the question under discussion just now. I'm trying to decide about this note."

"Do you want my advice?"

"Yes."

"Then accept the invitation."

"What! Go to his room just as he asks me?"

"Certainly. Pratt's not going to do you bodily harm. You may be sure of that. And, no matter what it's about, you can't be in any bigger mess

than you're in right now, or will be in if you don't go. Don't let them say you're a coward. If they've a charge to bring against you, face it like a man. I've talked all these things over with the fellows in our crowd, and their sentiments are similar to mine."

"Well, I'm not afraid of Tom Pratt," said Darcy, in a boastful tone. "I'll go to his room at seven to-night, and he'll have to talk straight to me."

"There will probably be no trouble on that score," said Will, dryly.

Darcy's was only a half-hearted resolve, but finally mixed in with it was a curiosity to know what Tom wanted. At five minutes to seven Darcy left his room and walked out into the corridor. A few steps down the hall, and he paused before the door of Chot and Tom. He listened. Voices came from within — a jolly crowd had apparently assembled.

"Well, they can't hurt me any," he muttered. "So here goes!"

In response to his rap there was a hush in the room, then someone said:

"Come in!"

Trying to appear cool and collected, Darcy opened

the door and stepped into the room. He found himself gazing into the face of "The Inseparable Nine," with the addition of Dick Kershaw and Hoki Nagasuki. Then the whole thing flashed over him. It was about the theft of the watch — that was why Tom Pratt had asked him here. Idiot that he was not to have suspected it and stayed away! But he was here now, and while he wanted to turn and dash out into the corridor, he feared the ridicule that would follow him.

"Good evening, Mumford," said Tom, pleasantly. "Glad you came. You received my note, of course?"

"Yes," replied Darcy in a faint voice. "What is it all about?"

"Kindly be seated. We have several matters to talk over in which I am sure you will be interested."

Darcy hesitated a moment, then dropped into the chair Tom indicated.

"I don't want this to seem like a court of inquiry, Mumford," Tom continued, "but you made some assertions to me in the gym the other day that certain persons have objected to on the ground that they were untrue. I thought the best way to settle the matter was to bring together the parties most concerned, so we can thresh the thing out.

You stated to me, if you will remember, that certain boys told you that my watch had been stolen, hence you knew positively that the watch you had purchased from a certain cadet in this school was mine. From whom did you receive that information?"

"Why, I — I am not in the habit of telling where I hear things."

"Did Chot Duncan tell you?"

"No."

"Did I tell you?"

"No."

"Then there was only one way in which you could have learned it, unless the thief himself confided in you. Did Hoki Nagasuki tell you?"

"Yes!" cried Darcy, shooting a glance of hatred at the little Jap.

"Oh, he told you, eh? And that was the first you knew that my watch was missing?"

"Yes."

"Then why did you come to me in the gym and tell me that Hoki had asked you to take the watch off his hands for twenty dollars?"

"Why, I — I —"

"If he told you that it was my watch, and that it had been stolen, would he have offered to sell it to you?"

"All I know is that I told you the truth!" cried Darcy, cognizant and naturally angry at being so easily caught.

"Will you deny that you had my watch in your pocket when you met Hoki that day on the parade ground? Think well before you answer, for there was a third party present at the meeting, and every boy in Winton hates a liar!"

"What has Fiske Murphy told you?" Darcy demanded.

"Nothing — yet. We have not seen Mr. Murphy. Will you answer my question?"

"Well, then, I did have the watch."

"And you came straight to me and told me Hoki had stolen it, and had sold it to you for twenty dollars."

Darcy began to feel very uncomfortable.

"Don't you think you owe Hoki an apology?"

"Well, I apologize! I had good reasons for doing as I did."

"Would you mind stating them?"

"I was trying to protect a friend?"

"The real thief — the man you bought the watch from?"

"Yes."

"Who was it?"

"If I tell you'll have to make it worth my while."

"Oh, and if I do make it worth your while, you'll tell?"

"Yes."

"Well, I won't make it worth your while! I don't want to hear you tell tales on a friend. We know who stole the watch. It was Joe Reagan, a member of your own set. At first we did not suspect him, thinking he was with you in the gym at the time the watch was stolen. But inquiry developed the fact that he was not. We know now that Hoki, who left the gym ahead of the rest of us that afternoon, saw Reagan come out of this room. He refused to tell me that, however, because in his country it is considered dishonorable to tell anything on a fellow student. Add to this the fact that Hoki had dropped a handkerchief, containing his initial, somewhere where it had been found, and that this handkerchief was found in this room, and you will readily understand why our friend, the Jap, was so anxious to find the real thief and force him to confess his crime."

"Well, I can't see how I am implicated in this matter," said Darcy. "I did not know at the time I bought the watch that Reagan had stolen it."

"I believe that statement, Mumford. It is your despicable action after you learned the truth, as well as the trick in the gym, when you loosened the button on your foil, hoping to injure Chot, and the manner in which you tried to win the Marathon a few days ago, that has caused me to ask you here to-night. I could cite other instances where you have wandered from the straight and narrow path to deal in treachery, but these will suffice. We have no desire, Mumford, to have you expelled from the school. What's done is done, and we are willing to pass it over, providing you play fair in the future. But the first piece of treachery you're caught in, in which any of this crowd is concerned, you'll be asked to leave the school, failing to do which, we'll go to the commandant and tell him everything. Now, you know our sentiments. As for your friend, Reagan, his plea that he was poor and that he needed the money he secured from the sale of the watch, was listened to with rapt attention, and his offense has been pardoned. If the twenty dollars I gave him has done him good, and will make a better boy of him, every fellow in this room will be glad."

"The twenty dollars *I* gave him, you mean, Pratt," said Darcy.

"I beg your pardon. I dislike to further embarrass you, but you will no doubt recall that I reimbursed you in the gym that afternoon for your outlay. As you have never paid back that money, I take the liberty to say that I, not you, made the donation to Mr. Reagan."

Darcy started to speak, but the words refused to come, and gnashing his teeth with rage, he rushed out of the room, slamming the door.

"There goes the most unprincipled scamp old Winton has ever known," said Bert Creighton.

"Don't forget Dill Newman," suggested Wilkes.

"I don't forget," said Bert; "we'll compromise and make it 'scamps,' if you like. They're a fine pair to draw to. But there's one great consolation — we know them for what they are."

"So let's be thankful and change the subject," said Chot.

"Speaking of Willie Astorbilt," said Pod, "I see that he has a large floating debt."

"That so?" queried Truem Wright.

"Yes; his yacht isn't paid for," returned the little fellow, with a smile.

Then Pod was "sat on," as usual, while the talk was turned into other channels, winter sports receiving a prominent place in the discussion.

CHAPTER XXIII

CONCLUSION

At the request of the Comrades, Dick Kershaw remained behind when the party broke up some time later. Chot had longed to ask the Montana boy for further information about Luther Pendleton, but until now had not found the opportunity.

"The fact is, Dick," said Chot, when the question had been put, "we are interested with Pendleton in a mining venture in Colorado. We believe there is something crooked going on out there, but we can prove nothing. We haven't heard from Pendleton in months, though we have written frequently. His daughter, who formerly lived in the same town with us, has also written without result."

"Under the circumstances," Dick replied, "I do not believe I shall be violating any confidence of my father's, when I say that Pendleton approached him some two months ago with a proposition to become interested in a mine. I have no doubt that it was the property in which you are interested. Pendleton wanted it developed, and was willing to give a one-fifth share to the person who would

install the machinery to do the work. After investigating the proposition, my father refused to take the risk."

"Was it because he felt that there wasn't sufficient ore in the mine to repay him?"

"No; because he felt that a one-fifth share would not compensate him for the outlay in moving the machinery there and doing the work."

"Then there is really something of value in the mine?" asked Fleet, an eager note in his voice.

"Yes, indeed! If you could raise the money amongst yourselves, for instance, and have the property developed, it should be a paying proposition. But you will hardly be able to interest a speculator unless you are willing to give up a half interest at least."

"Would a half interest be reasonable?" asked Chot. "I am not familiar with the subject, so please speak frankly."

"I believe you would be justified in giving a half interest to any man who would go to the expense of installing machinery on the property, with enough men to develop the proposition in a practical way."

"And you have no idea where Mr. Pendleton is at present?"

"No; but I'll be glad to write a confidential letter to my father."

"We will appreciate that. We have several thousand dollars tied up in the mine, but I'm afraid Mr. Pendleton has spent that for us, and that we'll never see him again."

"A good riddance if we don't!" growled Tom, who had always felt an instinctive dislike for Lucy's father, and with excellent cause, as those who have followed the adventures of the Comrades through the previous volumes will know. Tom, however, was in complete ignorance of just how deeply Mr. Pendleton had been concerned in his life. This he was to learn one day, and under very peculiar circumstances.

When Dick took his leave it was with a renewed promise to write his father immediately. He also agreed to broach to his father the subject of becoming interested in the mine, and if Mr. Kershaw thought favorably of it when all the circumstances were explained, a conference could be arranged between Dick's father and the Comrades, when the details of the plan could be worked out.

For an hour after the plebe had left the Comrades sat discussing the matter.

"I have a premonition that we are still in for

a lot of trouble with that old mine," said Chot, finally and Chot's premonition had foundation as the interested reader may learn in the volume entitled "Comrades on their Metal." "I wish the venture were well off our hands," he continued, "but now that we've gone into the thing, we'd better see it through."

With this sentiment, Tom and Fleet were thoroughly in accord.

"But let's go to bed," said Tom. "I want to feel fine to-morrow, because I have an idea that it will snow during the night, and if it does, I can scent some fine sport. As for you, Mr. Kenby, about the first thing I shall do will be to stuff a nice, white snowball down the back of your neck."

"You do," growled Fleet, "and I'll duck you so far in a drift, you won't see daylight for a year."

With which good-natured banter, and a cheery good-night, Fleet left his chums for the evening. And with their serious work and winter sports in prospect, we too will say good-night.

THE END